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The 2008 United States Senate Elections: A Typology of Negative Themes on Candidate-Sponsored Websites

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THE 2008 UNITED STATES SENATE ELECTIONS: A TYPOLOGY OF NEGATIVE THEMES ON CANDIDATE-SPONSORED WEBSITES

by

Erin Brining Hammond

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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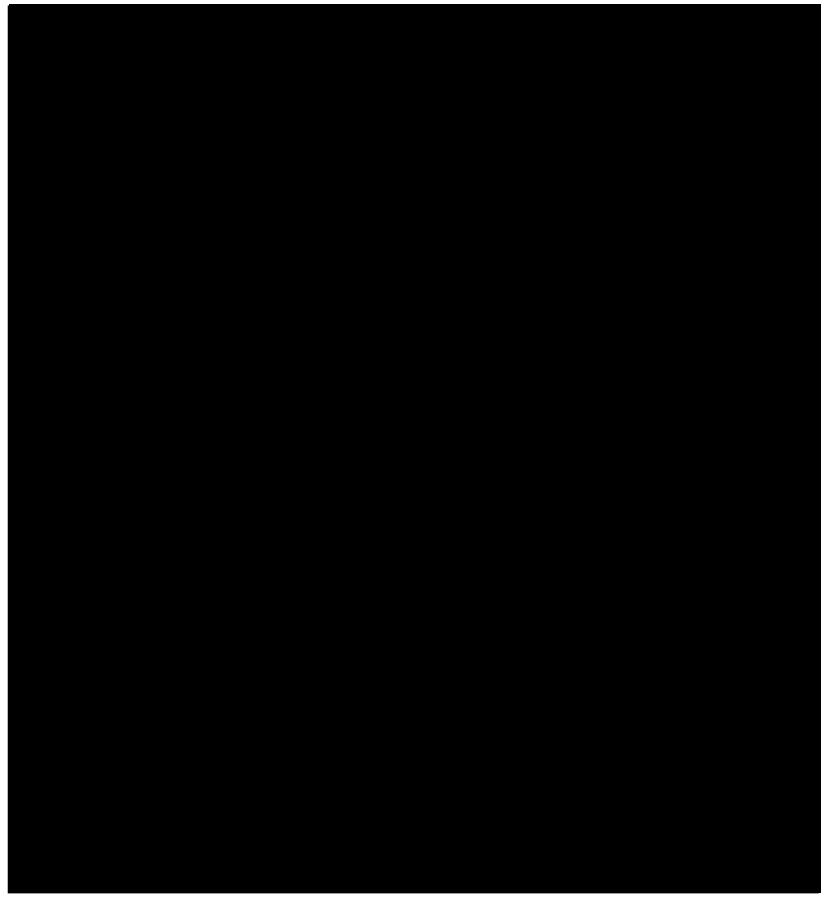

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ABSTRACT

THE 2008 UNITED STATES SENATE ELECTIONS: A TYPOLOGY OF NEGATIVE THEMES ON CANDIDATE-SPONSORED WEBSITES

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The following study is an examination of the negativity on candidate-sponsored websites for the 2008 United States Senate candidates. Results of a content analysis indicated that negative themes identified were more likely to be oppositional than comparative (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991) and were more likely to be character-based than policy-based (Benoit, 1999, 2007). The majority of negative themes were identified as focusing on issue stands rather than political record, job experience, criminal activities, religion, marriage/sex life, family members, medical history, or personal life (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland's, 1989).

Results of the content analysis go against the assumption of functional theory (Benoit, 2007, 1999; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997) that policy themes will be more prevalent than character themes. In addition, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative theme types was updated in order to be more relevant to candidate websites.

Ultimately, a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites was developed stemming from the results of the content analysis. The typology is derived not only from the results of the present study, but also from typologies developed to examine negative themes in other media (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland's, 1989, 1991; Benoit, 1999, 2007). This typology is a two-by-two matrix. Negative themes can be classified as

oppositional and policy-based, oppositional and character-based, comparative and policy-based, or comparative and character-based. Once a negative theme is placed into one of four categories, it can be broken down into past deeds, personal qualities, future deeds, and leadership qualities.

DEDICATION

For Jimmy—my chauffeur, personal chef, masseur, handyman, cheerleader, rock, husband, and friend…what a catch.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

"Roger Wicker has used every legal and illegal dirty trick in the book to save his desperate, failing campaign. It is time he comes clean. He should return and re-designate the money, and he had better not spend it illegally on this race." (MusgroveforSenate, 2008)

"It is disappointing that Ronnie Musgrove waited until only his sixth or seventh breath to get down in the mud and start negative campaigning by criticizing Senator Wicker. This may be a new record for Mississippi campaigns. The people of Mississippi are tired of politicians like Mr. Musgrove and their negative attacks." (WickerforSenate, 2008)

The above quotes were obtained from the official campaign websites of the two front-running candidates for one of the 2008 United States Senate elections in Mississippi. While negative campaigning is nothing new in American political campaigns, the Internet is an emerging medium in this context. Candidates and their campaign managers and advisors are continuing to learn how to utilize the Internet, and specifically candidate websites, in the most effective way.

Politicians are searching for the most effective way to persuade voters to vote for them. This is often determined by how candidates present themselves in political advertisements. Whether candidates decide to use negative campaigning directed at their opponent is a decision that has consequences, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Often candidates are judged by what they include in their commercials and on

their websites. While there is no guaranteed method of using negative political advertising, developing a typology regarding the use of negative themes on candidate websites should prove insightful.

Rationale

The purpose of the proposed research was to investigate websites of the candidates for the 2008 United States Senate elections, specifically content analyzing the negative themes utilized by the two front-running candidates in each race. The results of this analysis were helpful in developing a typology of negative themes with regard to candidate websites. This research is important for four distinct reasons. First, political campaigns are important. Second, political advertising is capable of influencing voters. Third, negative campaigning is prevalent in political campaigns. And, finally, the Internet is still an emerging medium in political campaigns and is becoming increasingly important in political campaign communication.

"In politics as in life, what is known is not necessarily what is believed, what is shown is not necessarily what is seen, and what is said is not necessarily what is heard" (Jamieson, 1992, p. 16).

The first reason this research is important is that political campaign communication is essential in elections. Candidates must be able to communicate their ideas to their constituents. And, this can be a difficult task if one candidate has to reach thousands, or even millions, of potential voters. Commenting on the difficulties of candidates running in large congressional districts, Herrnson (2004) noted, "Candidates who wish to run competitive campaigns cannot rely solely on communications that

involve direct voter contact, to say nothing of the difficulties faced by Senate candidates and an entire state's voting population" (p. 233).

Campaigns also spend large amounts of money on campaign communication. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) noted, "The amounts of money spent on political advertisements are staggering: Hundreds of millions of dollars are poured into what has become the main means of political communication in the United States" (p. 3). Even those whose research supports the pocketbook model of voting recognize the importance of political campaign communication. Markus (1988) stated that campaigns are necessary in order to heighten "voter awareness of prevailing economic conditions and the electoral relevance thereof" (p. 152). In addition to showing importance of political campaigns to inform potential voters, research has shown that political advertising can persuade voters.

"Lippmann (1922) recognized that our knowledge of the world is indirect, that public opinion is formed from the reports of others (i.e., the news)" (as cited in Benoit, 2007, p. 21).

The second reason the proposed research is important is that other studies have indicated that political advertising is capable of influencing potential voters (Benoit, Hansen, & Holbert, 2004; Garramone & Smith, 1984; Hill, 1989; Kaid, 1997; Kaid & Sanders, 1978). Benoit (2007) noted, "studies indicate that political messages can have a greater effect on voters' perceptions than the actual state of the economy" (p. 17).

Further, Brians and Wattenberg (1996) found that recollection of political advertisements was more related to knowledge of candidates' issue positions than

watching news or reading the newspaper (p. 185). In fact, data from the 2000 presidential election indicated that people living in battleground states, where campaigns were primarily focused in 2000, "had significantly more issue knowledge and issue salience than citizens from other states" (Benoit, Hansen, & Holbert, 2004, p. 177). Advertisements dealing with issues resulted in higher candidate evaluations, while advertisements dealing with image resulted in greater recollection of content (Kaid & Sanders, 1978). The capability to influence political elections gives political advertising power, especially with women and independents (Kaid, 1997). Therefore, exploring the uses of political advertising is essential in order to understand its effectiveness.

"Filthy storyteller." "Land pirate." "Ignoramus Abe." "A long, lean, lank, lantern-jawed, high cheek-boned, spavined, rail-splitting stallion" (as cited in Jamieson, 1992, p. 43).

When Abraham Lincoln was called "the ugliest man in the Union," and "two-faced" by his opponent, he responded, "If I had another face, do you think I'd wear this one?" (as cited in Jamieson, 1992, p. 46). Jamieson (1992) recounted some of the mudslinging aimed at Abraham Lincoln during the 1864 presidential election. Negativity in political campaigns is nothing new. A third reason, therefore, that the proposed research is important is that negative campaigning is prevalent and needs to be studied. Negative campaigning is not a new phenomenon. Jamieson (1986) noted that during the 19th century, "the air then was filled not with substantive disputes, but with simplification, sloganeering, and slander" (p. 12). At the same time, however, some researchers argue that negative campaigning is more prevalent now than it has ever been

(Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008; Geer, 2006; West, 2005). Because political advertising is capable of influencing voters, and negative campaigning is present whether we like it or not, negative campaigning is an area that needs to be researched.

For the purposes of this research, only negative themes were examined. An existing body of literature on negative campaigning exists, and I wish to add to that literature. Research on negative campaigning indicates that the percentage of negative themes in political campaigns is increasing (Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008; Geer, 2006; West, 2005). Jasperson and Fan (2002) noted that negative information demonstrates approximately four times the force of positive information (p.10). Moreover, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) found that two-thirds of respondents could describe a negative political advertisement, even after an election was over. Because of the increasing presence of negative themes in political campaigns, and because negative themes demonstrate more force and stay with voters longer than positive themes, research in this area is justified.

"An important new weapon in the political campaign arsenal is the campaign Web page" (Benoit, 2007, p. 80).

A final reason the proposed research is important is that the Internet is a relatively new medium in political campaign communication, and therefore has not been studied as extensively as other available media. Benoit (2007) noted, "The Internet is an example of a completely new medium. …Changes in mass media—new technologies and increasing

market penetration of technologies—have significant effects on political campaigning" (p. 25).

In addition, the popularity of the Internet in political campaigns has increased during every election in the past decade, which makes current research increasingly important (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005; Kaylor, 2008). Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) highlighted the increasing importance of the Internet during the 2004 presidential election. "The Internet reached new levels of campaign importance, providing voters with information from candidates, the media, and independent sources" (p. 265). In fact, the number of visitors to candidate websites doubled from the 2000 election to the 2004 election (Politics Online, 2004).

Statistics from June of 2008 showed that 72.5 percent of Americans are Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2008). In addition, 46 percent of voters have indicated that they have used the Internet to obtain information about the 2008 presidential election (Politics Online, 2008). Perhaps the most important reason why candidate websites need to be studied is that in an investigation of candidate websites during the 2000 presidential election, Hansen and Benoit (2005) found that websites can influence voters.

Research has been conducted on the role of television advertising in political campaigns, as well as on negative advertising specifically. Yet, while numerous research studies have investigated different types of negative advertising found on political television commercials (Benoit, 1999, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit & Wells, 1996; Jamieson, 1992; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989), very little research exists with regard to negative campaigning on candidate websites. Further, a specific area that has yet to be researched with regard to negative campaigning on candidate

websites is the development of a typology of negative themes used on candidate-sponsored websites.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following literature review, I examine the relevant research with regard to negative campaigning and Internet campaigning, as well as the theoretical basis developed for researching political campaign communication. I cover the following six areas in an effort to highlight the relevant research that will guide the proposed study: 1) negative campaigning, including the different definitions of negative campaigning, the history of negative campaigning, the types of negative campaigning, the benefits and drawbacks of negative campaigning, and research on negative themes on television and on the Internet; 2) Internet campaigning, including its benefits and drawbacks; 3) Benoit's (2007, 1999) functional theory; 4) a theory of persuasive attack; 5) Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) types of negative advertising; and 6) Kathleen Hall Jamieson's (1992) responses to political attack.

Negative Campaigning

Negative Campaigning Defined

Negative campaigning has been defined in a variety of ways by different researchers. Because of the wide array of research conducted on the subject, even the terminology used among researchers differs. While some researchers prefer to use the term *negative campaigning*, others prefer to use *negative advertising* or *political attacks*. Some researchers differentiate between the terms; others use them interchangeably. Jamieson (2000) acknowledged this problem:

> The phrases "negative campaign" and "negative campaigning" are troubling because it is unclear what they mean. ...Academics, pundits, and reporters tend to

> conflate ads that feature one-sided attack, contrast ads that contain attack, ad hominem attack ads, and ads featuring attacks that deceive. All are grouped under the word "negative." (p. 97)

Jamieson went so far as to say that "scholars have perpetuated the confusion" (p. 98). Therefore, in an effort to avoid misrepresenting another researcher's purpose, in the following literature review, I use the terms provided and used by the researchers themselves. Then, I offer the definition employed by this research project.

Some researchers argue that negative advertisements are advertisements used by one candidate or party to degrade perceptions of an opponent (Merritt, 1984). Tuman (2008) viewed negative ads as trafficking in the comparison and contrast of images and issues, either explicitly or implicitly. McNair (2007) defined negative advertisements as focusing on the alleged weaknesses of an opponent rather than focusing on the positive attributes of the sponsoring candidate. Elving (1996) defined negative campaigning as covering "an array of assaults on an opponent's positions, performance, and personality" (p. 440).

Some researchers note that negative campaigning is not always characterized as an attack or assault. Klotz (1998) argued that "whether fair or unfair, engagement or assault, the defining feature of negative campaigning is discussing the opposing candidate with the intention of putting that person in an unfavorable light" (p. 348). And, Geer (2006), in his book aptly entitled *In Defense of Negativity*, defined negativity as "any criticism leveled by one candidate against another during a campaign" (p. 23).

So, who uses negative campaigning? Many candidates use it, but in a study conducted on the 2004 presidential election, Kaid and Dimitrova (2005) found that

advocacy groups actually produce more negative campaign advertisements than do the actual candidates. A separate study conducted by Prior (2001) found that Republican advertising was more negative than Democratic advertising in a 1996 Columbus, Ohio election. The majority of negative campaigning, though, comes from candidates challenging an incumbent. In fact, 53 percent of challengers used negative campaigning on the Internet, compared with only 31 percent of incumbents (Klotz, 1998). In addition, while negative campaigning is less popular on the Internet than it is on television, the candidates who do use negative campaigning on the Internet tend to use it extensively (Klotz, 1998).

Negative theme defined. For the purposes of this research, I borrow from Merritt (1984) and Benoit (2000) to define *negative themes* as arguments, claims, or assertions used by one candidate to degrade perceptions of an opponent. Therefore, a negative theme can include anything personal or political, issue-oriented or not, comparative with the sponsoring candidate or not. It is necessary to note that a *negative theme* does not necessarily constitute an *attack.*

Geer (2006) articulated that negativity in a political campaign can serve as a beneficial outlet of information. Negative campaigning, or themes, can include such tactics as challenging the qualifications of another candidate, questioning the stances of other candidates, and offering legitimate criticisms of other candidates. Therefore, debating candidates will likely utilize negative themes if, for example, they refer to the opposing candidate's position on an issue rather than merely asserting their own position.

At the same time, mentioning an opposing candidate does not necessarily constitute a *negative theme.* If the theme does not aim to *degrade perceptions of an*

opponent, it is not considered a *negative theme*. For example, the following statement would not be considered a *negative theme* because it was not used to *degrade perceptions of an opponent*: "John Doe is running against incumbent senator John Doe."

History of Negative Campaigning

In an examination of general trends in United States advertising, McNair (2007) noted that negatives have been present from the 1964 presidential election onwards. Kaid and Johnston (1991) noted that the 1980s were a decade dominated by negative campaigning and mudslinging. At the same time, Jamieson (1986) posited that negative campaigning did not begin with televised advertisements.

> The transparencies, bandanas, banners, songs, and cartoons that pervaded the 19th century campaigning telegraphed conclusions, not evidence. … Their messages were briefer… than those of any 60 second spot ad. The air then was filled not with substantive disputes, but with simplification, sloganeering, and slander. (p. 12)

Others argue that the presence of negative campaigning can be assumed much earlier because of Aristotle's definition of an epideictic speech as placing praise or blame (Aristotle, trans. 1932; Klotz, 1998).

Diamond and Bates (1992) included attacking the opposing candidate as a major factor in their four-phases of a typical United States political advertising campaign. After establishing the basic identity of the candidate and establishing the candidate's policies, Diamond and Bates said that the opponent should then be attacked, using negatives. Finally, in the fourth and final phase, the candidate should be aligned with positive values and aspirations. Other researchers, however, have found that candidates go negative

through the entire campaign (Tarrance, 1982), or that candidates start negative and end positive (Elving, 1996).

While negative campaigning is not a new phenomenon, some researchers indicate that the use of negative campaigning is increasing as candidates put more emphasis on the negative (Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008; Geer, 2006; West, 2005). In addition to remaining a consistent aspect of political campaigns over time, negative campaigning can also be categorized into different typologies.

Types of Negative Campaigning

Devlin's typology. Devlin's (1986) typology of political advertising includes eight major types of advertisements: primitive ads, talking head ads, production or concept ads, cinema-verite spots, man-in-the-street ads, testimonials, and negative ads. Of particular interest to this research study are the negatives. A distinction that can be made among negative advertisements is a focus on personal characteristics versus the political aspects of the opposing candidate (West, 1993). Klotz (1998) found that negative campaigning focused more on issue positions than on personal qualities.

Jamieson's typology. Jamieson (1992) offered three categories in her typology of political advertising: oppositional, self-promotional, and engaged. According to Jamieson (1992), an oppositional ad is one in which more than 50 percent of an advertisement focuses on the opponent without providing information about the sponsoring candidate. A self-promotional ad is one in which more than 50 percent of the ad focuses on the sponsoring candidate. An engaged ad provides relevant information about both candidates.

Jamieson (1992) offered four characteristics of oppositional ads. First, "the stronger the attack, the greater amount of specific factual content in the ad" (p. 103). Second, "the stronger the attack, the more likely the ad is to cite multiple sources of support including direct quotation of the opposing candidate" (p. 103). Third, "the stronger the attack, the greater the likelihood that the claims will be ascribed to some presumably neutral, nonpartisan authority such as a newspaper" (p. 103). And, finally, "the amount of factual content is higher in oppositional and engaged ads than in self-promotional ads" (p. 103).

Klotz (1998) argued that the "existing typology of negative ads, oppositional or comparative, should not be thrown out entirely but rather enhanced" (p. 347). He further argued that "distinguishing between types of comparative ads on the basis of whether the candidate develops an argument can improve understanding of the rhetoric of negative campaigning" (p. 347). Therefore, following Jamieson's (1992) lead, Klotz (1998) offered three categories of negative campaigning: oppositional, superficially comparative, or engagingly comparative (p. 348).

Jamieson (1992) referred to negative comparisons with candidates as identification and apposition. Identification can include personal identification, identification with policies, and visual identification. Identification can suggest an association between an opponent and a negative image or can identify an opposing candidate with a negative idea or policy. Apposition refers to contrasting candidates and values. This tactic involves attempting to "make their candidate's name a synonym for everything the electorate cherishes and transform the opponent into an antonym of those

treasured values" (Jamieson, 1992, p. 47). The strategies for apposition include verbal and visual apposition.

The us versus them tactic. Another type of negative campaigning is the utilization of the *us* versus *them* contrast (Jamieson, 1992). Using the *us* versus *them* approach, by its nature, requires the presence of an out-group. This group can be defined either explicitly or implicitly. Candidates can employ a number of tactics using this approach, many of them based on discrimination.

The first *us* versus *them* tactic uses loyalty versus treason (p. 67). Since the beginning of the United States of America, a president has always been required to be *American enough.* While the definition of what constitutes being *American enough* is subjective and varies not only over time, but also person to person, many campaigns have spent great amounts of time and money trying to prove that their preferred candidate is *American enough* and that the opposing candidate is not.

The second *us* versus *them* tactic is distinguishing between the God-fearing versus the worshippers of the false god (p. 72). From the years of attacks on Catholicism to the focus on Mormonism in the 2008 primary election, creating an *us* versus *them* dichotomy with regard to religion has been an available attack tactic. Whether out of fear of the unknown or over disagreements on beliefs and practices, religion remains an effective tool in creating an *us* versus *them* dichotomy in political campaigns.

A third tactic deals with a dichotomy between superior and inferior races (p. 75). Jamieson (1992) notes, "In the nineteenth century, one could libel an opponent simply by alleging that he had Negro ancestry, supported interracial sex, or considered blacks and whites equal" (p. 75). During the mid-twentieth century, a campaign in the South could

simply circulate pictures of an opposing candidate pictured with African Americans "to inflame Southern passions" (p. 47). Even as recent as the 2008 presidential campaign, race was a salient issue with regard to campaign attacks.

A final tactic using the *us* versus *them* dynamic deals with the natural versus the unnatural, or the normal versus the abnormal (p. 81). This tactic deals with a candidate's sexuality, specifically homosexual tendencies and extra-marital affairs. Candidates have used this tactic to imply or to try to prove that their opponent is different from conventional people.

The *us* versus *them* tactic is rarely used explicitly. Many times, these attacks are veiled, allowing the attacking candidate the opportunity to deny responsibility for it. "Some campaign themes dare not speak their name. They play to whispered fears, prejudices privately held but publicly denied. They are powerful means of channeling hostilities toward one candidate or away from another" (Jamieson, 1992, p. 84). Subtle ways in which this tactic can be used include using codes and cues, veiled verbal cueing, and veiled visual cueing (Jamieson, 1992, pp. 85-100).

For the purposes of this research, I develop the following typology: 1) oppositional negative comments: those comments that focus on directly attacking the opposing candidate; and 2) comparative negative comments: those comments that compare the sponsoring candidate's virtues with the opposing candidate's shortcomings (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991). "Out of the resulting contrasts between and among candidates are borne the simplest dualities in which campaigns traffic: friend against enemy, saint against satan, the candidate of the people against the candidate of privilege, the patriot against the traitor" (Jamieson, 1992, p. 44).

Benefits of Negative Campaigning

Examining the effectiveness of political advertising is not a new area of research. Many studies have been conducted in this area, including studies of negative advertising. While some studies have determined that negative political advertisements are ineffective, other studies have shown the opposite, that negative political advertisements are effective. Used strategically, negative advertisements can be very beneficial to the sponsoring candidate. Perhaps the most apparent way negative campaigning can benefit the sponsoring candidate is the use of negative campaigning to damage the credibility of the sponsoring candidate's opponent (Tuman, 2008). In addition, negative advertisements can provide an opportunity for candidates to make negative comparisons and contrasts with their opponents (Tuman, 2008).

Another benefit of negative campaigning is that negative advertisements tend to generate more media coverage than positive advertisements. As a result, negative advertisements tend to receive more play. Newhagen and Reeves (1991) noted that negative advertising is effective because these types of advertisements increase the accuracy and speed of visual recognition. Tuman (2008) recognized the potential for negative ads to increase the "shelf life" of advertising for the sponsoring candidate.

Research also shows that negative advertisements definitely draw attention. Jasperson and Fan (2002) noted, "In terms of the relative weight of positive and negative information... negative information demonstrated approximately four times the force of positive information" (p. 10). And, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) found that two-thirds of respondents could describe a negative political advertisement after an election.

At the same time, studies have shown that negative political advertisements actually work (Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Pinkleton, 1997; Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1993). Weigold (1992) found that when political candidates used negative advertising campaigns, the messages lowered the evaluations of the attacked candidate. Stephen Marks (2007) went further to assert that negative campaigning is actually responsible for winning elections. He correlated specific forceful negative campaigns with successful campaigns. For example, Marks believed the number one reason why John Kerry lost the 2004 presidential election to George W. Bush was the effect of the *Swiftboat* advertisements. "Therefore it was Kerry's negatives, more than Bush's positives, that decided this election" (p. 142).

Negative information can significantly harm the favorability of the attacked candidate (Jasperson & Fan, 2002). Weaver-Lariscy and Tinkham (1999) examined the sleeper effect in negative political advertising. They found that an attack is effective and, over time, the impact becomes substantially more effective. In addition, contrary to other studies, Pinkleton, Um, and Austin (2002) found that negative campaigning did not have an effect on the cynicism, efficacy, or apathy of voters. Similarly, Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, and Cole (1990) and Garramone and Atkin (1990) found that negative advertisements had no effect on voters' likelihood of turning out to vote. Perhaps these results are due to the findings of other researchers that indicate negative advertising is actually beneficial to voters.

Geer (2006) defended negative campaigning by identifying the informative benefits of negative ads. He asserted that negative attacks challenge candidates' qualifications and stances on issues, which, in turn, inform voters on relevant issues.

Likewise, Benoit (2007) noted, "Legitimate criticism is a form of attack that can help voters make an informed choice" (p. 38). Jamieson (2000) stated, "Attack-based differentiation is an important way to determine that one candidate is better qualified than others" (p. 99).

Drawbacks of Negative Campaigning

While some research has shown that running negative advertisements does offer some benefits, other research has shown that running negative advertisements can be risky. Significantly, Hill (1989) found that negative advertisements actually worked contrary to how they were intended. Negative attacks on the opposing candidate had little effect, but the sponsoring candidate was looked at less favorably after airing the negative advertisement. This is also known as a boomerang effect, or a backlash against the sponsoring candidate (Jasperson & Fan, 2002). Sonner (1998) found that using negative campaigning can be extremely risky. She noted, "While negative advertisements can be effective for shifting voters away from an opponent, this does not always translate into increased support for the sponsoring candidate. ... furthermore, negative political ads can generate a serious backlash against the sponsoring candidate" (p. 40). Jamieson (2000) found that attack advertisements, which, to Jamieson, means the ad is at least 90 percent attack content, reduce the "sponsoring candidate's vote share" (p. 113).

Tuman (2008) also noted that negative comments sometimes provoke condemnation for the sponsoring candidate. In fact, because of the risk of the boomerang effect, many candidates have opted to use political surrogates to launch the most negative campaign advertisements. Pinkleton (1997) did find, however, that if a candidate uses a

more comparatively engaging approach, as opposed to an oppositional approach, the boomerang effect can be avoided. Or perhaps negative advertising is bad news for everyone. Merritt (1984) found that "negative political advertising evokes negative affect toward both the targeted opponent and the sponsor" (p. 27).

Another drawback for using negative campaigning is that it may not really benefit the constituents (Jamieson, 1992). Some research suggests that negative campaigning actually contributes to lower voter turnout (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Budiansky, 1996). Jamieson (2000) found that only strong attack advertising negatively affects voter turnout, but contrast advertisements actually help to mobilize voters. In addition, voters have reported that they do not like negative campaigning (Jamieson, 1992; Merritt, 1984; Pfau & Kenski, 1990). Specifically, people tend to view comparative ads more favorably than negative ads (Meirick, 2002). Further, Pinkleton, Um, and Austin (2002) found that participants believed negative advertising to be less useful for decision making in campaigns than more positive advertising.

So, why is there competing research on negative campaigning? Perhaps intervening variables contribute to the conflicting findings. Faber, Tims, and Schmitt (1993) found that paying attention to television news increases the impact of negative campaign advertisements. Or maybe Chang's (2003) study explained it best. The results of the study showed that when voters were exposed to negative or positive messages for competing candidates, they viewed the candidate of their personal party affiliation as significantly more positive than before seeing the ads, and viewed the candidate of the opposing party as significantly more negative than before seeing the ads. Garramone and

Smith (1984) found that the more a viewer identifies with a political party, the more positive the voter will evaluate the party's commercials. Further, "this positive evaluation of the commercial, in sequence, leads to a more negative evaluation of the targeted candidate" (p. 774).

The type of negative campaigning may be what is important. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) had respondents volunteer their perceptions of political advertisements. From the responses, the researchers grouped topics of negative political advertisements into certain categories; generally into either political issues or personal characteristics. In addition, respondents were asked to explain what constitutes fair and unfair negative advertising.

Eighty-three percent of respondents indicated that the attacks on political issues were fair game, but less than half of the respondents agreed that the attacks on personal characteristics were fair. Specifically, respondents viewed ads dealing with political record, voting record, stands on issues, and criminal record as being fair; and they viewed ads dealing with medical histories, personal life, religion, sex life, family members, and marriages as being unfair or unacceptable (p. 893). So, these results indicate that negative attacks as a whole may be viewed both positively and negatively, but perhaps attacks on political issues are more acceptable than attacks directed at personal characteristics.

Negative Themes on Television Commercials

Because television has the capacity to use both audio and visual channels, the message's redundancy is increased, and the viewer is more likely to remember the message (Drew & Grimes, 1987). In 1996, Jamieson claimed:

> Political advertising is now the major means by which candidates for the presidency communicate their messages to voters. As a conduit of this advertising, television attracts both more candidate dollars and more audience attention than radio or print. Unsurprising, the spot ad is the most used and the most viewed of the available forms of advertising. (p. 517)

Other researchers have indicated that television advertising is not only the main means of political communication, but is also where candidates spend the bulk of their funds (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; West, 1997). Consequently, Benoit (2007) noted that television spots, along with debates, are the most studied message forms in political campaign communication.

Research on negative television advertisements has shown that, in general, the percent of negative advertising has risen in the past couple of decades. Eleven percent of the 1988 primary election television advertisements were negative, compared with 17 percent in the in the 1992 primary elections (Kaid, 1994; Payne, Marlier, & Barkus, 1989). Benoit, Pier, and Blaney (1998) found that 40 percent of the televised advertisements during the 1996 Republican primaries were negative. West (1997) found that 43 percent of ads were negative between 1952 and 1992.

Research has also been conducted on televised political advertising in nonpresidential campaigns. Pfau, Parrott, and Lindquist (1992) found that about half of the televised ads in the 1984 senate elections and the 1986 congressional elections were negative. Hale, Fox, and Farmer (1996) found that 43 percent of televised political advertisements from the 1984 through 1994 congressional elections were negative. Lau

and Pomper (2004) found that almost 34 percent of televised ads were negative in the senate campaigns from 1988 to 2002.

In addition, certain characteristics of candidates may indicate that they are more or less likely to use negative advertising. Incumbents, for example, are less likely to use negative advertising than are challengers (Brazeal & Benoit, 2006; Kaid & Davidson, 1986; Lau & Pomper, 2004). Benoit (2007) found that challengers attacked more than incumbents in televised political advertisements from the United States House of Representatives elections in 2000, United States Congressional elections between 1980 and 2000, gubernatorial elections from 1974 to 2000, and local elections from 1998.

Another characteristic for which researchers have conflicting findings is the candidate's political party. West (1993, 1997) found that Republican ads tended to be more negative than Democrat ads. At the same time, however, Devlin (1989) found that during the 1988 presidential election, Republican George H. W. Bush had fewer negative ads than Democrat Michael Dukakis. Moreover, in the 1992 presidential election, Democrat Bill Clinton had more negative ads than Republican George H. W. Bush (Devlin, 1993; Kaid, 1994). Yet, Devlin (1997) found that during the 1996 presidential campaign, Republican Bob Dole used more negative advertising than Democrat Bill Clinton (see also Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998). And, Republican George W. Bush ran a more negative campaign than Democrat John Kerry during the 2004 presidential election (Devlin, 2005).

As in presidential elections, no predictions can be made regarding party affiliation and negative advertising in non-presidential elections. Benoit (2007) and Brazeal and Benoit (2006) found that Democratic candidates attacked more than Republican

candidates. In contrast, Lau and Pomper (2004) found that Republican candidates attacked more than Democratic candidates.

Another characteristic that may be a factor in determining the prevalence of negative campaigning is election outcome. Benoit (2007) found that during the United States Senate elections in 2000, the United States Congressional elections from 1980 to 2000, and the gubernatorial elections from 1974 to 2000, winners attacked less than losers of campaigns in televised political advertisements.

Jamieson (1992) noted that television has changed the techniques, effectiveness, and possibly the tactics of attack (p. 63). More current research indicated that if television advertisements are negative, media attention tends to be negative, and the public tend to perceive the campaign as negative, as well (Ridout & Franz, 2008). These findings support the results of a study by McKinnon and Kaid (1999) on the effects of adwatches. They found that adwatches, conducted by news stations in an effort to deter dishonest campaigning, "may be doing more to enhance advertising effects than to expose negative campaigning" (p. 217). Research findings suggest that attack ads work to the sponsor's advantage because adwatch coverage does not offset advertising effects (p. 217).

Regardless, televised campaigning has opened the world of politics to an audience that had previously been uninformed and uninvolved. Televised negative advertising has proven beneficial to this brand of voter.

> When skillfully used, television's multiple modes of communication and powerful ability to orient attention can invite strong, unthinking negative responses in low-involvement viewers. And, by overloading our information-processing capacity

> with rapidly paced information, televised political ads can short circuit the normal defenses that more educated, more highly involved viewers ordinarily marshal against suspect claims. (Jamieson, 1992, p. 50)

Therefore, television has granted access to political discourse to those who are less involved in the political process. While television messages must be concise and to the point, aimed primarily at the less informed, less involved voter, the Internet provides the political candidate and the more involved voter access to information that is bound by neither time nor space.

Negative Themes on the Internet

While the majority of research on negative campaigning deals with negative television advertisements, negative campaigning on the Internet needs to be investigated. Still an emerging medium with regard to politics, the Internet provides more space and no time limitations for candidates running for political office. Jamieson (1992) suggested that different types of negative campaigning may emerge from different techniques of communication. And, the Internet has proven to be a new technique of political communication.

An interesting trend with regard to negative campaigning on the Internet is that a low rate of negative campaigning actually exists. While this topic is still relatively new, a number of studies have found similar results (Hammond, 2007; James & Sadow, 1997; Klotz, 1997, 1998). James and Sadow (1997) found that only 14 percent of candidates running for state or federal offices used negative comments on their websites. Klotz (1997, 1998) found that only 34 percent of candidate-sponsored websites included negative comments. Negative advertising on television, however, constitutes about half

of all political television advertisements (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Young, 1987).

Unlike televised advertisements, the Internet allows candidates an unlimited platform to communicate more in-depth ideas. Jamieson (1992) noted that longer forms of communication allow for more engagement. Even so, because the Internet is still such a new medium for political campaigning, whether positive campaigning will continue to dominate the medium is yet to be seen. In fact, the trend in televised advertising went from being primarily positive to increasingly negative (West, 1993).

This may be the case with Internet campaigning, as well. Content analyses of the 2000 and 2004 presidential campaign websites (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2005; Benoit, McHale, Hansen, Pier, & McGuire, 2003) indicated that negative attacks on opponents increased over time. During the 2000 general election, only two percent of the content on presidential candidates' websites consisted of attacks on the opponent. During the 2004 general election, 18 percent of the content on presidential candidates' websites was attacks on the opponent. Kaylor's (2008) study found advertisements on websites to be more negative than television advertisements. Perhaps this is a trend that will continue over time. However, as Benoit (2007) noted, only two years of Web pages have been analyzed.

Clearly, the Internet is a new medium in political campaigning that deserves more scholarly attention. Further research may show if the Internet will mirror television's negativity trend. The evolving role of negative advertising on the Internet is an interesting topic for future research, as candidates are determining whether or not negative campaigning is actually as effective on the web as it is on television.

Internet Campaigning

While the Internet is still a relatively new medium for political campaigning, it is quickly becoming an essential component of a campaign (Dahlgren, 2005; Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005). With each election cycle, a higher percentage of candidates employ the use of the Internet in their campaigns (Benoit & Benoit, 2000; D'Alessio, 2000; Foot & Schneider, 2002, 2006; Selnow, 1998). Further, the Internet is a much different medium than others because of its capability to transcend time and space limitations, as well as to provide the potential voter control over the content to which he or she is exposed (Davis, 1999). In addition, optimistic researchers have indicated that the Internet can help stimulate political interest and participation in young voters (Delli Carpini, 2000), saying it has the potential to bring new people into the political process (Krueger, 2002) and to lead to more citizen engagement (Howard, 2003).

Campaign websites can perform any number of functions for a political candidate, from providing information on political issues to raising campaign money. Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin (2005) found that candidate websites included links to requests for contributions, promotional items, and political advertisements. Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) noted some of the major functions of campaign websites:

> The candidates' campaign Web sites became a very visible part of the campaign communication and were used for a wide variety of purposes such as fundraising, volunteer mobilization, direct communication with the electorate, media relationships, replies and attacks against the opponent, and displays of endorsements, to name just a few. (p. 265)

Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) also found that channel, or medium, is a pertinent characteristic in political campaign communication and does make a difference, specifically with regard to television versus the Internet.

Decades before the Internet became a mainstream channel of communication, Marshall McLuhan (1964) asserted that "the medium is the message" (p. 7). Still today, political medium plays a major role in political campaign communication. Benoit (2007) explained some of the key differences between available campaign media. He noted that different voters are exposed to different media, and the different media contain different types of information, or at least the different media *emphasize* different content. Ultimately, this means that different audiences can actually receive different information from the same campaign.

One major difference between the Internet as a medium for political campaign communication and other available media, namely television, is the possibility for interactivity between the candidate and potential voters (Benoit & Benoit, 2005; Chung & Zhao, 2004; Selnow, 1998; Sohn & Lee, 2005; Warnick, Xenos, Endres, & Gastil, 2005). Stromer-Galley (2000) noted that candidate websites have increasingly included some form of interactivity. Many candidate websites have even begun to include Web logs, or blogs (Endres & Warnick, 2004; Trammel, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006). While most researchers see interactivity as a positive aspect of Internet campaigning, others have found that voters prefer only a moderate amount of interactivity (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003).

Wiese and Gronbeck (2005) identified one major difference in the Internet as a medium and other forms of political campaign communication. In studying the evolution

of presidential campaigning on the Internet during the 2004 presidential election, the researchers found that Cyberpolitics create a more personalized atmosphere than other available political campaign communication media. "Cyberpolitics worked to even the footing between candidate and citizen in 2004, allowing citizen identities to be individualized in a presidential campaign" (p. 531-532). Further, Stromer-Galley (2003) highlighted the ability of the online environment to allow for more open, and perhaps anonymous, political discussion than would other face-to-face situations in which social norms and fear of acceptance and approval could be a factor.

Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) conducted research on the 2004 presidential election in which participants were exposed to the same political messages. Some participants were exposed to the messages on television; others were exposed to the messages on the Internet. Results indicated that the Internet was more successful in raising candidate image, while political cynicism was reduced more for those who viewed the same messages on television. Different media perform different functions. Verser and Wicks (2006) reported that images can help shape attitudes about candidates by increasing credibility, commanding the audience's attention, and evoking emotions. Kaid (2003) noted, "Differences between Internet and traditional television exposure are much stronger than any differences between formats of the messages" (p. 683).

While a paucity of research does exist on candidate websites (including Benoit & Benoit, 2005; Chung & Zhao, 2004; Foot, Schneider, Dougherty, Xenos, & Larsen, 2003; Stromer-Galley, 2000), Benoit (2007) noted that researchers have very limited data on candidate websites because candidate websites are the least studied message form in political campaign communication (p. 65).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet Campaigning

Benoit and Benoit (2005) identified advantages of the Internet for voters: 1) The Internet is an additional source of information about the campaign. Jacques and Ratzan (1997) found that the Internet was a better source for learning about issues than television; 2) The Internet is available to voters; 3) Voters can access the Internet at their own convenience; 4) Voters can control the information to which they are exposed on the Internet; 5) The Internet allows the voter to access a number of different sources, including candidate websites, news outlets, party websites, and special interest group websites.

Benoit and Benoit (2005) also identified disadvantages of the Internet for voters: 1) Not all voters have access to the Internet; 2) Some voters who have access to the Internet do not seek out candidate information while online; 3) The cost of websites will continue to increase; 4) Quality of videos on websites are dependent upon the quality of the connection to the Internet.

In addition to the advantages and disadvantages Internet campaigning has for voters, Internet campaigning also has advantages and disadvantages for candidates. Benoit and Benoit (2005) identified advantages of using the Internet for candidates. 1) The Internet has the capacity to include text, photos, audio, and even video. 2) The audience for the Internet is very large. 3) Candidate websites are less expensive than television advertisements in personnel, time, and money. 4) "The Internet allows campaigns a chance to disseminate information to voters without passing through the media filter" (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, p. 233; see also Tedesco, Miller, & Spiker, 1999). 5) With websites, candidates can update information quickly. 6) Candidates can provide

more information and can include complete messages to voters (see also Xenos & Foot, 2005). 7) Candidates can personalize campaign messages through the Internet. 8) Candidate websites allow for interaction with voters.

Finally, Benoit and Benoit (2005) identified disadvantages of using the Internet as a medium for the candidates themselves. 1) Candidates cannot reach all voters through the Internet. 2) Voters must be willing and able to seek out the candidate websites. 3) Candidates need to keep the website updated, and to do this costs money. Selnow (1998) warns that utilizing the Internet can become very expensive. 4) If a website includes video, graphics, and other add-ons, those accessing the site will be required to have specific software, and loading the website can take a long time, which may lead to people leaving the website.

As with all communication media, the Internet, and specifically candidate websites, have both advantages and disadvantages. Yet, based on the increase in utilization of campaign websites by both candidates and voters, the advantages apparently outweigh the disadvantages. In order to more effectively study candidate websites, Benoit's (1999, 2007) functional theory provides a solid foundation.

Benoit's Functional Theory

In examining political advertisements in a number of contexts and media, Benoit (Benoit, 2007, 1999; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997) developed the functional theory of political campaign discourse. Functional theory is based on the assumption that campaign discourse has one ultimate goal, which is winning the election. "Political campaign discourse is therefore unquestionably instrumental, or functional, in nature" (Benoit, 2007, p. 32). In this section, I define the three main

categories of functional theory; then I explain the differences between policy and character; next, I explain the assumptions of functional theory; and, finally, I offer the advantages of functional theory.

Categories of Functional Theory

First, functional theory involves categorizing political comments, or themes, into three basic categories: positive, or acclaiming; negative, or attacking; and defense. First, acclaims are "statements that stress a candidate's advantages or benefits. Such self-praise can address the candidate's character or policy stands" (Benoit, 2007, p. 36). Second, attacks stress an opponent's weaknesses or undesirable attributes. However, as discussed before with regard to negative advertising, attacks are not always received well by potential voters. At the same time, "accurate criticism of an opponent can be useful for voters who need to consider both the pros and cons of the candidates when making a vote choice. ... Legitimate criticism...can help voters make an informed choice" (p. 38). The third category of functional theory is defense. Defense refers to a candidate's refutation after being attacked by an opponent.

Defense can be used to perform two important functions: first, to prevent further damage to the attacked candidate, and, second, to restore a candidate's preferability after an attack has occurred (Benoit, 2007). In her book *Dirty Politics*, Jamieson (1992) analyzed responses to political attacks from political campaigns, or using "ads against ads" (p. 106). As a result of her analysis, she identified seven types of responses: 1) counterattack, 2) taking umbrage, 3) distancing through humor that invites a test of plausibility, 4) using a credible source to invite a test of plausibility, 5) capitalizing on the

credibility of the press, 6) using disassociation from the negativity, and 7) admitting mistakes and asking forgiveness (p. 108-120).

> Defenses also have drawbacks, however.
>
> They are likely to take a candidate off-message (because attacks are likely to concern the target candidate's weaknesses), they risk informing or reminding voters of a potential weakness (a candidate must identify an attack to refute it), and they may create the impression that the candidate is reactive (defensive) rather than proactive. (Benoit, 2007, p. 43)

Therefore, functional theory examines political campaign discourse as either acclaim, attack, or defense.

Trent and Friedenberg (2000) categorized political television commercials into three functions that correspond with Benoit's (1999) acclaim, attack, and defense. Trent and Friedenberg (2000) identified the following functions: to extol the candidate's own virtues, to condemn and attack opponents, and to respond to attacks. Likewise, Pfau and Kenski (1990) categorized political television commercials into four types: positive, negative, comparative, and response.

Among the three functions of political campaign communication, Benoit (2007) suggested that because acclaims really have no drawbacks, they will be used the most often. And, because of the potential backlash effect of negative campaigning, attacks should be used less often than acclaims. At the same time, attacks do perform the function of decreasing an opponent's desirability, so functional theory predicts that attacks will be used more often than defenses. Finally, defenses can be used to restore a candidate's preferability. At the same time, however, defenses also have drawbacks, as

noted earlier. Therefore, functional theory predicts that defenses will not be used as often as acclaims or attacks.

Policy Versus Character

Benoit (2007) also looked at policy or issue versus character or image. Policy and character are defined as follows: "*Policy* utterances concern governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action. *Character* utterances address characteristics, traits, abilities, or attributes of the candidates" (p. 44). Benoit (2007) noted, "Because most voters consider policy to be more important than character, functional theory holds that candidates are likely to respond to these preferences so that policy will be discussed more frequently in presidential campaigns than character" (p. 47).

When examining a policy-based theme, Benoit (2007) broke themes down into 1) past deeds, 2) future plans, and 3) general goals. "Past deeds concern the outcomes or effects of actions taken by the candidate, usually actions taken as an elected official" (p. 52). Past deeds can be used both to attack another candidate, as well as to acclaim the sponsoring candidate. Next, "future plans are a means to an end, specific proposals for policy action" (p. 53). Third, general goals "refer to ends rather than means" (p. 54).

Benoit (2007) offered predictions on the use of these policy subforms. First, general goals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack. Second, ideals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack. And, finally, general goals will be used more frequently than future plans (pp. 54-55).

When examining a character-based theme, Benoit (2007) broke character into 1) personal qualities, 2) leadership qualities, and 3) ideals.

> Personal qualities are the personality traits of the candidate, such as honesty, compassion, strength, courage, friendliness. Leadership ability usually appears as experience in office, the ability to accomplish things as an elected official. Finally, ideals are similar to goals, but they are values or principles rather than policy outcomes. These three forms of character can be used to acclaim and attack. (p. 54)

When examining the uses of policy and character themes, Benoit (2003) found that presidential candidates who discussed policy more than character were more likely to win elections.

Assumptions of Functional Theory

Next, functional theory is based on five assumptions, or axioms (Benoit, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998). First, voting is a comparative act. Benoit argued that the decision to vote is essentially a choice between two or more competing candidates, so voting is based on a choice of which candidate is preferable to the other(s) (Benoit, 2007, p. 32). Second, candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents. Because voting is a comparative act, voters must be able to distinguish one candidate from another. If candidates appear to be the same, voters have no basis to prefer one candidate over another. Candidates may distinguish each other through character or policy (p. 34). Third, political campaign messages allow candidates to distinguish themselves. "Once a candidate decides which distinctions to stress to voters, he or she must convey that information to voters" (p. 35). Therefore, campaign messages are a necessary source of information. Fourth, candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending. Certainly, candidates want voters to distinguish them from other candidates in

favorable ways. "Only three kinds of statements or functions of discourse are capable of making a candidate appear preferable to opponents" (Benoit, 2007, p. 36). Benoit also asserted that candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks, and political candidates will use attacks more frequently than defenses (p. 43). Finally, a candidate must win a majority (or a plurality) of the votes cast in an election (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 16).

Advantages of Functional Theory

There are at least three distinct advantages to using the functional approach to analyze campaign discourse. First, functional theory adds a third category to the general positive and negative functions of political campaign communication. According to functional theory, defense is a distinct function in political campaigns, and thus deserves to be included in analyses of campaign discourse. Second, functional theory subdivides policy and character into more specific categories than other research. This allows for more specific results in analyses of political campaign discourse.

Third, the functional approach utilizes themes as units of analysis instead of larger units, such as television spots or speeches. Many television spots, for example, contain both attacks and acclaims, and to label a spot as *negative* when it also contains examples of acclaims is to overlook part of the campaign discourse. Therefore, a major advantage of the functional approach is to use themes as units of analyses. This is also helpful when comparing discourses of varying lengths, as well as with comparing different types of campaign messages. For example, using themes as units of analyses allows for comparisons between television commercials, websites, and speeches. Using larger units of analyses would not allow for these comparisons.

A Theory of Persuasive Attack

Pomerantz (1987) noted that a persuasive attack includes at least two elements: 1) It must be an act that is perceived as negative, and 2) It must contain an attribution of responsibility for the act. If these two elements are not present, an attack does not exist, or at least will not be effective. If the act is not perceived as negative by the salient audience, the attack will not produce its intended effect, and if the relationship of the recipient of the attack to the negative act is not clear, the attack will not produce its intended effect.

From these elements, Benoit and Wells (1996) developed a typology of persuasive attacks (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit & Dorries, 1996). First, they identified seven discursive strategies for increasing the offensiveness of the negative act. 1) Extent of the damage. "An act should be seen as more reprehensive when its consequences are more extensive...or more severe" (p. 30). 2) Persistence of negative effects. The longer the negative effects last, the more harm is done to the image of the recipient of the attack. 3) Recency of harms. The more recent the negative act, the worse it is for the recipient of the attack. 4) Innocence or helplessness of victims. Innocent and helpless victims evoke more outrage than victims who are more equipped to defend themselves. 5) Obligation to protect certain groups. If the recipient of the attack had a special duty to protect the victim, the worse it is for the attacked. 6) Inconsistency. The offensiveness should increase if the recipient of the attack has been known to speak against the relevant negative act or has condemned people in the past for committing the same type of negative act. 7) Effects on the audience. Offensiveness should increase if

the effects of the negative act are relevant to the audience (Benoit & Wells, 1996, p. 30-31).

Benoit and Wells (1996) also identified five rhetorical strategies for increasing the perceived responsibility for the negative act. 1) Intent to achieve the outcome. If committing the act seems to have been intentional, the offensiveness should increase. 2) Advance planning. If the act was planned, the reputation should be injured more than if the act was committed on the spur of the moment. 3) Knowledge of the act's consequences. Responsibility can be increased if the recipient of the attack was aware of the consequences of the negative act. 4) Prior commission of the offensive act. Responsibility can be increased if the recipient of the attack has performed the negative act before. 5) Benefit from the offensive act. The recipient of the attack is more likely to be held responsible for the negative act if he or she benefitted from it (Benoit & Wells, 1996, pp. 34-35). In addition to strategies for increasing the offensiveness and perceived responsibilities of negative acts, a typology exists that identifies the different types of negative advertising.

Johnson-Cartee and Copeland: Types of Negative Advertising

As explained earlier, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) identified types of political advertising after having voters explain the different types of negative advertisements to which they had been exposed. After assembling participant responses around common themes, ten types of political advertising emerged: 1) political record, 2) personal life, 3) issue stands, 4) current or past marriage, 5) criminal activities, 6) family members, 7) voting record, 8) religion, 9) medical history, and 10) sex life (pp. 890-891).

Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology proves helpful in categorizing different types of negative advertisements. While their typology was developed from political advertisements on television, I apply the same typology to candidate websites. To avoid confusion among coders, I condensed the typology to nine themes, combining issue stands and voting record, combining current/past marriage and sex life, and adding job experience and qualifications as a theme.

Research Questions

Even with all of the past and current research, it seems there are still inconsistent findings on negative campaigning. Conflicting research findings make it difficult to assess how effective these negative themes are. Because political campaigning on the Internet is still relatively new, a major gap in the research regarding negative campaigning still exists. No theory or typology has been developed regarding the use and types of negative campaigning on candidate-sponsored websites. Therefore, four research questions guide my study.

RQ1: Based on Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1991) typology, are oppositional or comparative negative themes more prevalent on candidate-sponsored websites?

RQ2: Based on Benoit's (1999, 2007) functional theory, are policy-based or character-based negative themes more prevalent on candidate-sponsored websites?

RQ3: Based on Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising (i.e., political record, job experience and qualifications, issue stands and voting record, current/past marriage and sex life, criminal activities, family members, religion, medical

history, and personal life), are some types of negative political themes more numerous than others on candidate-sponsored websites?

RQ4: Using the data gathered in the content analysis, what is the typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

To answer these research questions, a content analysis of the negative themes on each 2008 United State Senate candidate's website was conducted.

Procedure

Analyzing United States Senate Campaigns

For this study, all United States Senate campaigns during the November 2008 elections were analyzed. Nonpresidential campaigns are necessary to study because there are far more nonpresidential campaigns than presidential campaigns. In fact, Brazeal and Benoit (2001) argued that nonpresidential campaign messages may be more important than those at the presidential level because the media coverage of campaigns at the legislative level is not as consistent as media coverage at the executive level. Therefore, voters likely receive most of their information about non-presidential political candidates from political advertising.

Analyzing Candidate Websites

"The nature of each medium, or message form, can influence the nature or content of the messages produced in that medium" (Benoit, 2007, p. 87). While the medium is an important aspect of a political message, very little research has focused on candidate websites, even though the Internet is becoming increasingly important in political campaigns. The Internet is now well established as a medium in political campaigns (Benoit, 2007). "Clearly, more attention to candidate (and other) Internet sites is warranted" (p. 81).

Delimitations

A necessary element of any study is to establish parameters around the data to be analyzed. For the purposes of this research, only written words on the websites were analyzed. Therefore, visual images on the websites were not included in the analysis. Further, only original web content was included. Therefore, if content developed for other media (e.g. transcripts of speeches, television advertisements, interviews) was present on the websites, it was not analyzed.

In addition, each candidate's website can include any number of sections. Many websites include the following sections: Home, About the Candidate, Issues, News, Volunteer, Contribute, Contact the Campaign, Endorsements, and Candidate's Blog. For the purposes of this research, messages boards or forums were excluded from analysis, as they are not authored by the candidate's campaign.

In addition, links included on the candidate-sponsored websites that link to non-candidate-sponsored websites were not included in the analysis. Only information found directly on the candidates' websites was analyzed. Consequently, the actual wording of the links was included as part of the analysis.

All candidate websites were captured and downloaded on November 1, 2, and 3, 2008. These dates are significant because they were the three days before Election Day, November 4, 2008. Any content added after this date or taken off the website before this date was not included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

Because the purpose of this research was to develop a typology of negative themes used on candidate-sponsored websites, of particular interest was the presence of the different types of negative themes present on candidate websites. Content analysis was employed in order to best determine which themes were utilized most often. For the purposes of this study, a two-part content analysis was conducted. The first part of the content analysis was conducted by the researcher. The second part of the content analysis was conducted by three trained coders. To ensure that the content analysis was carried out properly, negative themes were used as the unit of analysis, an appropriate sample was obtained, preliminary coding was conducted by the researcher, a thorough codebook was developed, and trained coders were recruited. First, I will explain the importance of using negative themes as the unit of analysis.

Negative Themes as Units of Analysis

The majority of content analyses conducted on negative advertising have classified entire advertising spots as units of analysis (Benoit, 2007). However, Benoit's (Benoit, 1999, 2000, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998) functional approach utilizes themes as units of analysis. Specifically, arguments, claims, and assertions are considered themes. This is an important distinction. First, many advertisements, Web pages, speeches, debate responses, etc. contain more than one assertion, and each assertion may perform a different function.

For example, one political advertisement may be labeled as negative, but may also include positive statements. The same advertisement can include both attacks and acclaims.

> Because many television spots contain many different utterances, we do not classify entire ads as either positive (acclaiming) or negative (attacking), as is the case in most previous research. Some political ads are entirely positive or entirely negative, but many are mixed, and that mix is not always 50/50. (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 20)

This dilemma is highlighted by studies conducted on the 1996 presidential campaign television advertisements.

Kaid (1998) found that 61 percent of Bob Dole's television advertisements were negative, compared with 71 percent of Bill Clinton's ads. In contrast, Benoit (2000) found that 57 percent of Dole's ads were negative, compared with 48 percent of Clinton's ads. This is an important distinction because not only were Kaid's percentages higher for both candidates, but Kaid also found that Clinton was more negative than Dole. Benoit's analysis, on the other hand, resulted in lower percentages of negative advertising, and Dole came out as more negative than Clinton. These findings are so different because Kaid (1998) used the entire spot as the unit of analysis, and Benoit (2000) used each theme as the unit of analysis. Benoit, Blaney, and Pier (1998) noted that using theme as the unit of analysis provides "a more precise picture of *the degree to which* a political spot is positive, negative, or defensive" (p. 21).

Kaid and Johnston (1991) admitted that using an entire advertisement as a unit of analysis can affect results. "Our method of dichotomizing the sample into positive and

negative ads…is useful for analysis but may understate the amount of negative information about an opponent present even in a positive ad" (p. 62). In other words, just because an advertisement is predominantly negative or positive does not mean that it lacks other types of statements or themes.

Another advantage of using themes as units of analysis is that results from analyses of one medium or of one time length can more easily be compared with results from analyses of other media or other time lengths. Benoit (2007) noted:

> Using the theme as the coding unit also facilitates comparisons of different campaign messages. For example, if those who content analyze television commercials using the entire spot as the coding unit were to analyze other messages, what would they use as the coding unit? The entire speech? The entire debate? The entire Web page? Using the theme as the coding unit facilitates comparison of different kinds of campaign messages by content analyzing all messages with the same coding unit. (p. 58)

For the purposes of the proposed research, I analyzed candidate websites. In addition, using theme as the unit of analysis leaves the option open for broadening the research focus in the future.

Population

The population for this analysis consisted of the front-running candidates for the 35 United States Senate elections held in November of 2008. The population included all candidates who were actively campaigning for the United States Senate. In addition, any candidate that did not have an official campaign website was not included in the analysis.

Only one candidate did not have an official campaign website. Therefore, the population for the content analysis included 69 candidates (Appendix A).

Content Analysis Part One: Preliminary Researcher Coding

Because understanding theme as the unit of analysis is complicated and requires a thorough knowledge of analyzing discourse, the researcher, in lieu of coders, conducted the first part of the content analysis. This part of the content analysis involved identifying the negative themes on the candidate websites. Themes were organized into a *Negative Theme Code Sheet* (Appendix B). The *Negative Theme Code Sheet* included spaces for the names of the candidates, the numbers of each negative theme on each candidate's website, the prominence/placement of the negative themes, as well as space to copy and paste the actual negative themes into the document.

In addition, the researcher developed and completed a *Candidate Information Form* (Appendix C). The *Candidate Information Form* included a number of variables: candidate's name, candidate's region, candidate's state, contest in which the candidate is competing, whether or not the candidate is an incumbent, candidate's party, candidate's gender, whether or not the candidate is involved in an election with a male versus female dynamic, whether or not the candidate won the election, the number of web pages on the candidate's website, the total number of negative themes identified on each candidate's website, and the density of negativity score for each candidate. Because of the nature of these variables, they were completed by the researcher. Variables either dealt with general information about the candidate that would require research not readily available to coders or dealt with information found on candidate websites. The definitions of all

applicable variables are included in the *Variables and Definitions* section following the *Secondary Coder Coding* section.

Content Analysis Part Two: Secondary Coder Coding

Codebook. A codebook was developed to aid in the second part of the content analysis (Appendix D). The codebook is a detailed and exhaustive training and instruction guide for coders. The codebook includes definitions and examples of each term used in the analysis. The codebook, in essence, outlines what each variable entails.

The items in the codebook include the coder's ID, the name of the candidate, the number of the negative theme, the prominence of the negative theme, whether the negative theme is oppositional or comparative (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991), whether the negative theme is based on policy or character (Benoit, 1999, 2000, 2007; Benoit, Pier, Brazeal, McHale, Klyukovski, & Airne, 2002), and the type of negative theme being analyzed (political record, job experience and qualifications, issue stands and voting record, current/past marriage and sex life, criminal activities, family members, religion, medical history, or personal life) according to Johnson-Cartee & Copeland's (1989) typology.

Coders. Two coders were used to analyze the candidates' websites. Coders were supplied with a list of negative themes completed by the researcher (Appendix B), a codebook (Appendix D), and blank code sheets (Appendix E). Code sheets were used to simplify and organize the coding process. In addition, a copy of Benoit, Pier, Brazeal, McHale, Klyukovski, and Airne's (2002) sample attacks on forms of policy and character was supplied to each of the coders (Appendix F).

Coders initially attended a training session on March 15, 2009, in which they were instructed about the procedure involved in the coding process. Coders were also given definitions and examples of each variable involved in the coding process. In addition, coders were given the opportunity to ask questions about the procedure, coding process, negative themes, or variables.

After the training, in order to ensure acceptable intercoder reliability, coders initially coded a random sample of five percent of the negative themes together. The results of the analyses were compared using Cohen's Kappa in SPSS to assess intercoder reliability (Cohen, 1960). Cohen's Kappa has been used successfully to determine intercoder reliability in this manner by Roberts and Robinson (2004), Patterson, et al. (1996), and Bakeman and Gottman (1986). Until a Kappa coefficient of .80 was achieved on every variable, coders continued to be retrained, and intercoder reliability tests continued. Fleiss (1981) notes that Kappas of .75 or higher are excellent.

After the first round of coding, coders achieved interreliability scores of .948, .415, .641, and .742, for each variable respectively (see Table 1). Because three of the variables did not achieve Kappas scores of at least .80 required by the researcher, another round of coding was required. For the second round of coding, coders analyzed another five percent of the negative themes. After the second round of coding, the remaining three variables achieved Kappa scores over .80. Therefore, after ten percent of the negative themes were tested for intercoder reliability, coders achieved Kappa scores of .948, .927, .855, and .846 on each variable (see Table 1).

Table 1

Intercoder Reliability Summary Table: Cohen's Kappa Scores

Variable	Test I	Test II
Variable 1	.948	
Variable 2	.415	.927
Variable 3	.641	.855
Variable 4	.742	.846

High intercoder reliability is essential because it indicates that data are observed independently of the "measuring event, instrument, or person" (Kaplan & Goldsen, 1965, p. 84). Achieving high intercoder reliability is a result of appropriate operationalization of the terms present in the content analysis. Coders followed a codebook developed for the specific study (Appendix D). The codebook provided definitions, as well as explanations for how to code the candidate websites.

Answering Research Questions

RQ1. In order to most effectively answer RQ1, frequencies and descriptive statistics were used.

RQ2. In order to most effectively answer RQ2, frequencies and descriptive statistics were used.

RQ3. In order to most effectively answer RQ3, frequencies and descriptive statistics were used.

RQ4. The statistics used to answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 were used to answer RQ4. Because RQ4 deals with developing a new typology for negative themes on candidate websites, the results of the first three research questions were essential to developing an updated and relevant typology.

Variables and Definitions

This research study contains a two-part content analysis and a number of variables. Definitions of all applicable variables and terms are included below.

Variables

Candidate: This variable indicates the name of the United States Senate candidate being analyzed.

Oppositional negative theme: An oppositional negative theme is an argument, claim, or assertion that puts the opponent in an unfavorable light without comparing the opponent to the sponsoring candidate. For example, the following statement would be considered an oppositional negative theme: "John Doe is a joke and should not be allowed to serve our country in this capacity."

Comparative negative theme: A comparative negative theme is an argument, claim, or assertion in which the sponsoring candidate compares the opponent with himself or herself. An example of a comparative negative theme may be, "James David supports legislation that would close tax loopholes for wealthy corporations, while John Doe supports loopholes and tax breaks for special interests."

Policy attack: Themes concerning governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action (Airne & Benoit, 2005, p. 480; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 49; Benoit, 2007, p. 52-54).

Past deeds: One of three subcategories of policy remarks. Past deeds concern the outcomes or effects of actions taken by the candidate, usually actions taken as an elected official (Benoit, 2007, p. 52).

Future plans: One of three subcategories of policy remarks. Future plans are a means to an end, specific proposals for policy action. For example, if a candidate gives *specifics* about what they want to do while in office, that would constitute a future plan (Benoit, 2007, p. 53).

General goals: One of three subcategories of policy remarks. General goals refer to ends rather than means. For example, cutting taxes, without specifying which taxes or how much will be cut, would be indicative of a general goal (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).

Character attack: Themes concerning characteristics, traits, properties, abilities, or attributes of candidates or their parties (Airne & Benoit, 2005, p. 480; Benoit, 2007, p. 52-54; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 49).

Personal qualities: One of the three subcategories of character remarks. Personal qualities refer to the personality traits of the candidate (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).

Leadership qualities: One of the three subcategories of character remarks. Leadership ability generally refers to experience while in office or the ability to accomplish things while in office (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).

Ideals: One of the three subcategories of character remarks. Ideals refer to the values or principles of a candidate (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).

Political record/Acts in office: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to any official acts conducted of a political nature while in office, not including voting record.

Job experience and Qualifications: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to professional qualifications possessed or job positions held, or lack thereof.

Issue stands and Voting record: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Includes general and specific stances on political and social issues, as well as how an individual voted on such issues.

Current/past marriage and Sex life: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to any theme explicitly dealing with an individual's current marriage, past marriage, or sex life.

Criminal activities: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to a suggestion, accusation, or statement involving illegal activity, whether related to official business or not.

Family members: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to a negative theme dealing with an individual's family members, but does not include references to a candidate's marriage.

Religion: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to a comment about an individual's religious affiliations, beliefs, or rituals, or to an individual's lack thereof.

Medical history: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to a negative theme dealing with an individual's medical history, including diagnoses and medical procedures.

Personal life: One of the nine categories developed from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising. Refers to a negative theme dealing with an individual's personal life, including personal affiliations and past actions, but excludes job experience and qualifications, marriages, sex life, criminal activities, family members, religion, and medical history.

Additional Definitions

Negative theme: Because the definitions of negative advertising and negative campaigning vary greatly among researchers, I borrow from Merritt (1984) and Benoit (2000) and define *negative themes* as arguments, claims, or assertions used by one

candidate to degrade perceptions of an opponent. Therefore, a negative theme can include anything personal or political, issue-oriented or not, comparative with the sponsoring candidate or not. At the same time, a comment mentioning an opposing candidate does not necessarily constitute a *negative theme.* For example, the following statement would not be considered a *negative theme* because it does not degrade perceptions of an opponent: "John Doe is running against incumbent senator John Doe."

2008 Senate elections: The 2008 Senate elections refer only to the United States Senate elections held in November of 2008. This particular election cycle consists of 35 separate elections, two of which are special elections. Both the regular and the special elections are included in this term.

Coder ID: Each coder was assigned a coder ID by the researcher, and coders were instructed to enter their coder ID for each negative theme they analyzed. This variable is important when conducting intercoder reliability tests and can be helpful in analyzing reliability for overall data.

Assumptions

The author made the assumption that because the websites analyzed were the official candidate-sponsored websites for the campaigns, the candidates were responsible for the content on the sites. The author acknowledged that the candidates employ writers, advisors, and other professionals to assist with the running and updating of the websites. However, as with campaign communication in other media and contexts in which the candidates receive assistance from writers, advisors, and other professionals (e.g. television commercials, speeches, and debates), the candidates are ultimately responsible for what is communicated by their official campaigns.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In order to analyze the data from the content analysis, the statistical program SPSS was used. Specifically, the frequency of the different types of negative themes on the candidates' websites was determined (oppositional vs. comparative; policy vs. character; specific type of negative theme used). For those interested in reading about additional variables and statistical findings, supplemental data is included in Appendix G.

Research Questions

RQ1: Based on Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1991) typology, are oppositional or comparative negative themes more prevalent on candidate-sponsored websites?

Oppositional themes were more prevalent than comparative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. While 292 (26.9%) of the 1084 negative themes identified were comparative, 792 (73.1%) were oppositional (see Table 2). Collectively candidates used almost three times as many oppositional negative themes than comparative negative themes on their websites. As a whole, candidates made negative comments about their opposition without making comparisons to their own positive attributes.

RQ2: Based on Benoit's (1999, 2007) functional theory, are policy-based or character-based negative themes more prevalent on candidate-sponsored websites?

Character-based negative themes were more prevalent than policy-based negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. Six-hundred twenty-four negative themes were character-based (57.6%), compared to 459 policy-based negative themes (42.3%) (see Table 3). Of the 459 policy-based negative themes, 54 percent were based on past

Table 2

Oppositional and Comparative Negative Themes

	Oppositional	Comparative	Total
Number (%)	792 (73.1%)	292 (26.9%)	1084

Note. Positive themes were excluded from analysis.

deeds, 3.5 percent were based on future deeds, and 42.6 percent were based on general goals (see Table 4). Of the 624 character-based negative themes, 10.9 percent were based on personal qualities, 27.2 percent were based on leadership qualities, and 61.2 percent were based on candidate ideals (see Table 5).

RQ3: Based on Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) typology of negative advertising (i.e., political record, job experience and qualifications, issue stands and voting record, current/past marriage and sex life, criminal activities, family members, religion, medical history, and personal life), are some types of negative political themes more numerous than others on candidate-sponsored websites?

Of the 1084 negative themes identified, 145 (13.4%) dealt with the opposing candidate's political record or acts in office, 179 (16.5%) dealt with the job experience and qualifications of the opposing candidate, 338 (31.2%) dealt with the opposing candidate's issue stands or voting record, 9 (< 1%) dealt with criminal activities of the opposing candidate, 2 (< 1%) dealt with the opposing candidate's religion, 252 (23.2%) dealt with the opposing candidate's personal life, and 159 (14.7%) of the negative themes were attributed to other. Marriage and sex life, family members, and medical history were not referenced in a negative manner on United States Senate candidate-sponsored websites during the 2008 elections (see Table 6).

RQ4: Using the data gathered in the content analysis, what is the typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites?

A typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites emerged throughout the data collection. Some of the categories appropriate for other media did

Table 3

Prevalence of Policy and Character Negative Themes

Negative Theme Category	Frequency
Policy	459 (42.3%)
Character	624 (57.6%)
Don't Know	1 (0.1%)
Total	1084

Table 4

Subclassifications of Policy Negative Themes

Policy Themes	Frequency
Past Deeds	248 (53.9%)
Future Deeds	16 (3.5%)
General Goals	196 (42.6%)
Total	460

Table 5

Subclassifications of Character Negative Themes

Character Themes	Frequency
Personal Qualities	68 (10.9%)
Leadership Qualities	170 (27.2%)
Ideals	382 (61.2%)
Don't Know	4 (0.6%)
Total	624

not prove applicable for candidate-sponsored websites.

Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1991) oppositional versus comparative typology is an important aspect when examining negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. This category indicates whether or not a candidate is comparing himself or herself to the opposing candidate. While the majority of negative themes in this analysis were oppositional, some were comparative.

Benoit's (1999, 2007) policy versus character typology is another basic component in a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. This category explains whether the attack is against the opposing candidate's policy or against the opposing candidate's character. Benoit's categorization, however, can be simplified for a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites.

Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) categorization of negative political themes could be altered to better analyze negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. 1) Political record/acts in office can be combined with voting record. 2) Job experience and qualifications should remain a variable. 3) Issue stands should remain a variable, but voting record could be combined with political record and acts in office. 4) Current/past marriage and sex life was not identified on any of the candidate-sponsored websites. Therefore, this variable was deleted. If a researcher did identify this negative theme on a candidate-sponsored website, it could be included in the personal life category. 5) Criminal activities can remain a variable, although it did not account for a large percentage of the negative themes identified in this analysis. 6) Family members does not need to remain a variable for a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored

Table 6

Prevalence of Negative Theme Types

Theme Type	Frequency
Political Record	145 (13.4%)
Job Experience	179 (16.5%)
Issue Stands	338 (31.2%)
Marriage/Sex Life	0
Criminal Activities	9 (0.8%)
Family Members	0
Religion	2 (0.2%)
Medical History	0
Personal Life	252 (23.2%)
Other	159 (14.7%)
Don't Know	0
Total	1084

websites. If a researcher identifies this type of negative theme on a candidate-sponsored website, it can be included in the personal life category. 7) Religion can remain a variable, although it did not account for a large percentage of the negative themes identified in this analysis. 8) Medical history does not need to remain a variable in a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. If a researcher identifies this type of theme on a candidate-sponsored website, it can be included in the personal life category. 9) Personal life should remain a variable in a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites.

In addition to the types of negative themes identified by Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989), some further types of negative themes were identified that should be included in a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. 1) First, a category for personality and character should be included. In fact, for this analysis, character and personality were included under the category of personal life and accounted for 57.5 percent of negative themes in that category and 13.4 percent of the negative themes overall. 2) A category should be included for attacking another candidate for attacking. These types of negative themes were included under the category of others and accounted for 90.6 percent of negative themes in that category and 13.3 percent of the negative themes overall. Ironically, many of the negative themes identified dealt with attacking the opposing candidate for running a negative campaign. 3) A category should be included that deals with dishonesty and backtracking. These types of negative themes would not qualify as criminal acts, so they were included under the personal life category. Because of the large amount of this type of negative theme, it would be beneficial to include it in a typology of negative themes on candidate websites. 4) A final category

that should be included deals with associating with disreputable or dishonest people. Again, these types of negative themes did not have their own category, so were included in the personal life category. Because this type of negative theme is so common on candidate websites, it would be beneficial to include it in a typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites in the future.

In an effort to simplify the current typologies, as well as to create a comprehensive typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites, a matrix was developed (see Table 7). First, the theme should be identified as oppositional or comparative. Second, the theme should be identified as a policy or character negative theme. Next, depending on the first two categories, the theme should be placed in one of three quadrant sub-classifications. For an oppositional policy theme, the theme should be further divided into either past deeds, personal qualities/ideals/goals, or future deeds. For an oppositional character theme, the theme should be further divided into past deeds, personal qualities/ideals/goals, or leadership qualities. For a comparative policy theme, the theme should be further divided into past deeds, personal qualities/ideals/goals, or future deeds. For a comparative character theme, the theme should be further divided into past deeds, personal qualities/ideals/goals, or leadership qualities (see Table 7). Personal qualities/ideals/goals includes the following variables: political philosophy, ethical philosophy, personality, character, religion, rhetorical vision, dishonesty/backtracking (not specific instances), attacking another candidate (not specific instances), personal life (not specific instances), and associating with dishonest or disreputable people (not specific instances). Leadership qualities include job

Table 7

Typology of Negative Themes on Candidate-Sponsored Websites

	Policy	Character
Oppositional	Past Deeds Personal Qualities Future Deeds	Past Deeds Personal Qualities Leadership Qualities
Comparative	Past Deeds Personal Qualities Future Deeds	Past Deeds Personal Qualities Leadership Qualities

qualifications and general work experience. Past deeds include the following variables: political/voting record, acts in office (specific instances), criminal activities, personal life (specific instances), attacking another candidate (specific instances), dishonesty/backtracking (specific instances), and associating with dishonest or disreputable people (specific instances). Future deeds refer to promises made and speculation about policies and legislation. Because of the complexity of these variables, examples are provided for each (see Table 8 and Table 9).

Table 8

Typology of Negative Themes on Candidate-Sponsored Websites: Examples

Typology Variable	Example Negative Theme
Personal Qualities/Ideals/Goals	
Political Philosophy	"He is one of the most partisan politicians in Washington."
	"Senator Hammond made it abundantly clear that no amount of pain felt by Colorado families could move her away from her agenda of putting more money in the pockets of oil companies."
Ethical Philosophy	"Despite a system that is structurally incapable of managing ethics, one where Congress is supposed to watch itself, Hammond has been happy to let her friends in Congress get away with countless instances of corruption."
	"Mr. Doe believes that the Constitution does not apply to everyone."
Personality	"After meeting Mr. Doe at a house party, Ms. Smith was convinced that he cared more and represented her more accurately than his Republican counterpart, who tends to be unapproachable and self-important."
Character	"We deserve someone who will stand up for what is right, and there is only one candidate in this race who will do that."
	"Senator Hammond believes that every child's life is precious and that it is wrong for Mr. Doe to attempt to score political points over the death of children."
Religion	"Senator Hammond has been 'bearing false witness against fellow Christians' when she suggests that Mr. Doe was affiliated with a group of atheists."
	"Smith's attack on Hammond's faith drives this heated campaign even lower."

Table 8 (continued).

Typology Variable	Example Negative Theme
Rhetorical Vision	"Unfortunately, he tends to take a wait and see attitude."
Dishonesty/ Backtracking (not specific instances)	"Doe calls on Hammond to be honest with Alabamians."
Attacking Another Candidate (not specific instances)	"Unlike Senator Hammond, you won't see any misleading attacks from me—our ads are hard-hitting and factual."
	"Senator Hammond's attacks are nothing but the tired old political tactics of every Hammond campaign."
Personal Life (not specific instances)	"John Doe owns 11 homes in six states."
Association with Dishonest/ Disreputable People (not specific instances)	"Senator Hammond consistently stands with corrupt lobbyists like Jack Abramoff."
	"Karl Rove and his buddies will stop at nothing to keep Senator Hammond in power."
Leadership Qualities	
Job Qualifications	"Hammond is constantly trying to change the subject from who will best represent Georgia's middle class families in this time of economic uncertainty and who is most capable of strengthening the American economy."
	"It is disturbing that Mr. Doe only campaigns from behind the seal of his accidental temporary governorship."

Table 8 (continued).

Typology Variable	Example Negative Theme
Past Deeds	
Political/Voting Record	"I have seen him turn his back on the American principles of liberty, justice, and limited government by voting for the Military Commissions Act."
Acts in office (specific instances)	"Wall Street and special interests fund Hammond's July out-of-state resort getaway."
	"Hammond spent more than $86,000 on air travel and

Table 8 (continued).

Typology Variable	Example Negative Theme
Speculation about Policies/ Legislation	"John Doe delivered a clear choice to Colorado voters in today's second debate of the campaign—the Doe plan to lower gas prices immediately, break America's dependence on foreign oil, and create jobs in Colorado, or the Hammond plan to drive profits even higher for big oil companies while Colorado families get no relief at the pump."

Table 9

Typology of Negative Themes on Candidate-Sponsored Websites Examples

	Policy	Character
Oppositional	Past Deeds- "I have seen him turn his back on the American principles of liberty, justice, and limited government by voting for the Military Commissions Act."	Past Deeds- "Hammond was raising money for John McCain earlier this week at the same event that was being promoted by Ralph Reed—the disgraced Republican operative and associate of lobbyist-turned-convicted felon Jack Abramoff."
	Personal Qualities- "He is one of the most partisan politicians in Washington."	Personal Qualities- "John Doe owns 11 homes in six states."
	Future Deeds- "Senator Hammond's plan is to drive profits even higher for big oil companies while giving Colorado families no relief at the pump."	Leadership Qualities- "It is disturbing that Mr. Doe only campaigns from behind the seal of his accidental temporary governorship."
Comparative	Past Deeds- "Senator Hammond voted for the Military Commissions Act, which was a blow to liberty and justice. Representative Smith was adamantly opposed to this act."	Past Deeds- "In September, while Mr. Doe was being convicted of seven felonies, Senator Hammond was cheering on our troops in Iraq."
	Personal Qualities- "While Senator Hammond is one of the most partisan politicians in Washington, Representative Smith has proven that he is willing to work across the aisle."	Personal Qualities- "Unlike Senator Hammond, you won't see any misleading attacks from me—our ads are hard-hitting and factual."
	Future Deeds- "We are confident that Doe will work more closely with Representative Smith than Hammond would to bring down oil prices to benefit all of Colorado."	Leadership Qualities- "In the end, Hammond's experience and commitment to Iowa make her a better candidate than challenger John Doe, who has never run for or held public office."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Implications

Implications for Benoit's (1999, 2007) Functional Theory

Benoit's functional theory (Benoit, 1999, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997) is based on the assumption that campaign discourse has one ultimate goal, winning an election. Therefore, functional theory holds that political campaign discourse is instrumental or functional in nature (Benoit, 2007, p. 32). Benoit (2007) noted that because most voters consider policy to be more important than character, functional theory would hold that candidates will discuss policy more frequently than character (p. 47). Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne (2007) hypothesized and found that in televised United States Senate and Gubernatorial debates, candidates did focus more on policy than character. They noted, "Voters at both the presidential and Congressional level report that policy is a more important determinant of their vote than character" (p. 79; see also Benoit, 2003; Brazeal & Benoit, 2001).

This functional theory assumption was not true in the case of the websites of the candidates in the 2008 United States Senate election. Over 57 percent of the negative themes identified on candidate websites were character-based, compared with 42.3 percent of policy-based themes (see Table 3, p. 57).

One possible explanation of these findings could be that issues are less important in congressional elections than they are in presidential elections (Brasher, 2003). Another possible explanation for these findings could be that Benoit's functional theory includes acclaims, defenses, and negative themes. In the present research study, only

negative themes were examined. Or perhaps the medium is most important. Perhaps candidates chose to include more character-based negative themes on their websites than they did in other media.

Update of Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) Negative Theme Types

Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) categorization of negative political themes has been updated, based on the analysis of candidates' web presence, to better analyze negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. Specifically, in this context, political record/acts in office can be combined with voting record. Job experience and qualifications should remain a variable. Issue stands should remain a variable, but voting record can be combined with political record and acts in office. Current/past marriage and sex life was not identified on any of the candidate-sponsored websites; therefore, this variable can be deleted. If a researcher did identify this negative theme on a candidate-sponsored website, it could be included in the personal life category. Criminal activities can remain a variable, although it did not account for a large percentage of the negative themes identified in this analysis. Family members does not need to remain a variable because no instances of this type of negative theme were identified in this analysis. If a researcher identifies this type of negative theme on a candidate-sponsored website, it can be included in the personal life category. Religion can remain a variable, although it did not account for a large percentage of the negative themes identified in this analysis. Medical history does not need to remain a variable because this type of negative theme was not identified in this analysis. If a researcher identifies this type of theme on a candidate-sponsored website, it can be included in the personal life category. Finally, personal life should remain a variable.

In addition to the types of negative themes initially identified by Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989), some additional types of negative themes were identified in the current analysis that should be included in a typology of types of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites. 1) First, a category for personality and character should be included. In the current analysis, character and personality were included under the category of personal life and accounted for 57.5 percent of negative themes in that category and 13.4 percent of the negative themes overall. 2) A category should be included for attacking another candidate for attacking. These types of negative themes were included under the category of others and accounted for 90.6 percent of negative themes in that category and 13.3 percent of the negative themes overall. Ironically, many of the negative themes identified dealt with attacking the opposing candidate for running a negative campaign. 3) A category should be included that deals with dishonesty and backtracking. These types of negative themes would not qualify as criminal acts, so they were included under the personal life category. Because of the large number of this type of negative theme identified in the current analysis, it would be beneficial to include it as its own category. 4) A final category that should be included deals with associating with disreputable or dishonest people. These types of negative themes did not have their own category, so were included in the personal life category. Because this type of negative theme is so common on candidate websites, it would be beneficial to include it as a specific variable for negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites.

Therefore, based on the 2008 United States Senate elections, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland's (1989) updated typology for negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites would include the following variables: 1) political record/acts in office/voting

record, 2) job experience/qualifications, 3) issue stands, 4) criminal activities, 5) religion, 6) personal life, 7) personality/character, 8) attacking for attacking, 9) dishonesty/backtracking, or 10) associating with dishonest/disreputable people.

Typology of Negative Themes on Candidate Websites

A number of typologies for examining negativity for political candidates currently exist. A typology to examine negativity on candidate-sponsored websites did not exist prior to this undertaking. By taking the relevant and applicable aspects of existing typologies for examining negativity on candidate television commercials, speeches, and other media, and adding components from the current research findings, a typology for examining negativity on candidate-sponsored websites has been developed.

This typology fills a gap in political communication research. It provides an effective means by which to examine negative themes on candidate websites. The matrix developed here will serve as an efficient tool for analyzing negative themes on candidate websites.

Limitations

Entire Site Not Analyzed

Due to the nature of candidate websites, the sites were not analyzed in their entirety. Certain stipulations were applied. First, only written words appearing on candidate websites were analyzed. Because many of the websites include audio and video components designed to be played in other media, these types of components were excluded from the analysis. Headings or captions for these components were analyzed, however.

Second, only original web content was analyzed. Some websites included copies of news articles, for example. Because this content was not created originally for the website, it was excluded from analysis. Third, sections authored by persons other than the candidate and his or her staff were excluded from analysis. For example, some candidate-sponsored websites included message boards. Anyone with access to a computer and the Internet could post information on the message board, which would then become a part of the candidate's website. Because this information was not intentionally posted by the candidate or his or her staff, it was excluded from analysis.

Finally, linked websites were not analyzed. While the actual wording of links on candidate-sponsored websites was included in the analysis, any website linked to the candidate-sponsored website was excluded from analysis. To be clear, hyperlinks that linked to other sections of the candidate-sponsored websites were included. Only websites not authored by the candidate or the candidate's staff were excluded from analysis.

Non-Candidate-Sponsored Websites Not Analyzed

Many candidates had websites created by others to support or oppose their candidacy. Only the official candidate-sponsored sites were included in this analysis. Because the candidate had no control over the content of the other websites, including these sites in the analysis would hurt the results.

Websites Frozen In Time

Websites are ever changing. Content can be uploaded or deleted in a matter of moments. Because of this attribute, the candidate-sponsored websites were saved and analyzed as if frozen in time. Based on the amount of attention given to a candidate's

website, some remained unchanged during the course of the campaign, while others were updated daily. This is a limitation because for some of the websites, not all of the content was analyzed.

Four Websites Lost

During the course of analyzing the content of the websites, four websites were lost. All candidate sites were uploaded to an external hard drive and were saved. Due to a technical glitch, four random sites were deleted from the hard drive. The lost websites belonged to candidates Jim Slattery of Kansas, Tom Allen of Maine, Mark Warner of Virginia, and Jay Wolfe of West Virginia. Because the websites were no longer available on the Internet, the websites for these four candidates were excluded from analysis.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could examine contests for offices other than the United States Senate. Data from the present analysis could be compared to data from analyses of candidates running for other offices to determine variable similarity.

Because of the changing nature of candidate websites, future studies could analyze from various campaign stages. These analyses could be compared to see if the levels and types of negativity remain stable throughout a campaign. Analyses could be performed for individual candidates or for the group of candidates as a whole.

Finally, future studies could utilize the typology of negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites developed in the present study. The purpose of this typology is to improve and simplify the process of analyzing negative themes on candidate websites. The typology is not unique to Senate candidates and can be applied to any candidate's

website. Further, using a single typology will aid in the comparison of the results from independent, unconnected research studies.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF 2008 UNITED STATES SENATE CANDIDATE AND WEBSITES

State	Republican	Democrat	Other
Alabama	Jeff Sessions * www.jeffsessions.com	Vivian Figures http://figures2008.com	
Alaska	Ted Stevens* http://tedstevens2008.com	Mark Begich www.begich.com	
Arkansas		Mark Pryor* www.pryor2008.com	Rebekah Kennedy-Green Party www.kennedy2008.org
Colorado	Bob Schaffer www.bobschafferforsenate.com	Mark Udall www.markudall.com	
Delaware	Christine O'Donnell http://christineodonnell08.com	Joe Biden* www.bidenforsenate.com	
Georgia	Saxby Chambliss* www.saxby.org	Jim Martin www.martinforsenate.com	
Idaho	Jim Risch www.risch4idaho.com	Larry LaRocco www.laroccoforsenate.com	
Illinois	Steve Sauerberg www.sauerberg2008.com	Dick Durbin* http://ga3.org/dickdurbin	
Iowa	Christopher Reed www.christopherreed2008.com	Tom Harkin* www.tomharkin.com	
Kansas	Pat Roberts* www.robertsforsenate.com	Jim Slattery www.slatteryforsenate.com	
Kentucky	Mitch McConnell* www.teammitch.com	Bruce Lunsford www.bruce2008.com	

Louisiana	John Kennedy www.johnkennedy.com	Mary Landrieu* www.marylandrieu.com
Maine	Susan Collins* www.susancollins.com	Tom Allen www.tomallen.org
Massachusetts	Jeff Beatty www.jeffbeatty.com	John Kerry* www.johnkerry.com
Michigan	Jack Hoogendyk www.jackformichigan.org	Carl Levin* www.carllevin.com
Minnesota	Norm Coleman* www.colemanforsenate.com	Al Franken www.alfranken.com
Mississippi	Roger Wicker* www.wickerforsenate.com	Ronnie Musgrove http://musgroveforsenate.net
Mississippi	Thad Cochran* www.thadforsenate.com	Erik Fleming www.erikfleming.org
Montana	Bob Kelleher www.bobkelleher2008.com	Max Baucus* www.maxbaucus2008.com
Nebraska	Mike Johanns www.mikejohanns2008.com	Scott Kleeb www.scottkleeb.com
New Hampshire	John Sununu* www.teamsununu.org	Jeanne Shaheen www.jeanneshaheen.org
New Jersey	Dick Zimmer www.zimmerforsenate.com	Frank Lautenberg* www.lautenbergfornj.com
New Mexico	Steve Pearce www.peopleforpearce.com	Tom Udall www.tomudall.com
North Carolina	Elizabeth Dole* www.elizabethdole.org	Kay Hagan www.kayhagan.com
Oklahoma	James Inhofe* www.jiminhofe.com	Andrew Rice www.andrewforoklahoma.com

Oregon	Gordon Smith* www.gordonsmith.com	Jeff Merkley www.jeffmerkley.com
Rhode Island	Bob Tingle www.bobtingle.com	Jack Reed* www.jackreed2008.com
South Carolina	Lindsey Graham* www.lindseygraham.com	Bob Conley http://aimhighwithbob.com
South Dakota	Joel Dykstra www.joeldykstraforsenate.com	Tim Johnson* www.timjohnson.com
Tennessee	Lamar Alexander* www.lamaralexander.com	Bob Tuke www.tukefortennessee.com
Texas	John Cornyn* www.johncornyn.com	Rick Noriega www.ricknoriega.com
Virginia	Jim Gilmore www.jimgilmoreforsenate.com	Mark Warner www.markwarner2008.com
West Virginia	Jay Wolfe www.jaywolfe2008.com	Jay Rockefeller* www.jay08.com
Wyoming	Michael Enzi*	Chris Rothfuss www.rothfussforsenate.com
Wyoming	John Barrasso* www.barrasso2008.com	Nick Carter www.nickforsenate.com

* indicates an incumbent

APPENDIX B

NEGATIVE THEME CODE SHEET AND INFORMATION

Negative Theme Code Sheet Information

Candidate: For this variable, the researcher will provide the name of the candidate whose website is being analyzed for negative themes.

Number of Theme: For each candidate's website, the negative themes identified will be numbered. For each candidate, this number will begin with one. This number will be used to check the accuracy of the information provided by the coders with the negative themes identified and provided by the researcher.

Prominence/Placement of Negative Theme: This variable deals with where the negative theme is located on the website. Specifically, this variable concerns how many levels the negative theme is from the website's home page. Each time the visitor to the website must click to access the negative theme, a level is counted. The total number of levels indicates the prominence of the negative theme. Fewer levels indicate more prominent negative themes; more levels indicate less prominent themes.

- 1= Negative theme on home page
- 2= One level from home page
- 3= Two levels from home page
- 4= Three levels from home page
- 5= Four levels from home page
- 6= Five levels from home page

Negative Theme: In this section, the researcher will copy and paste the negative theme (argument, claim, or assertion) from the candidate's website. Coders will then use the *Negative Theme Code Sheet* to analyze each negative theme.

Negative Theme Code Sheet

Candidate	# of Theme	Prominence of Theme	Negative Theme

APPENDIX C

CANDIDATE INFORMATION FORM

Candidate Information Form (to be completed by researcher)

Candidate: The name of the United States Senate candidate being analyzed.

Region: The United States Census Bureau divides the United States into four regions: the Northeast, the Midwest, the South, and the West.

The Northeast region includes the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

The Midwest region includes the states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri.

The South region includes Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

The West region includes the states of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii.

- 1= Northeast
- 2= Midwest
- 3= South
- 4= West

State: The state in which the candidate is running for a United States Senate seat.

- 1= Alabama
- 2= Alaska
- 3= Arkansas
- 4= Colorado
- 5= Delaware
- 6= Georgia
- 7= Idaho
- 8= Illinois
- 9= Iowa
- 10= Kansas
- 11= Kentucky

- 12= Louisiana
- 13= Maine
- 14= Massachusetts
- 15= Michigan
- 16= Minnesota
- 17= Mississippi
- 18= Montana
- 19= Nebraska
- 20= New Hampshire
- 21= New Jersey
- 22= New Mexico
- 23= North Carolina
- 24= Oklahoma
- 25= Oregon
- 26= Rhode Island
- 27= South Carolina
- 28= South Dakota
- 29= Tennessee
- 30= Texas
- 31= Virginia
- 32= West Virginia
- 33= Wyoming

Contest:

- 1= Alabama
- 2= Alaska
- 3= Arkansas
- 4= Colorado
- 5= Delaware
- 6= Georgia
- 7= Idaho
- 8= Illinois
- 9= Iowa
- 10= Kansas
- 11= Kentucky
- 12= Louisiana
- 13= Maine

- 14= Massachusetts
- 15= Michigan
- 16= Minnesota
- 17= Mississippi I
- 18= Mississippi II
- 19= Montana
- 20= Nebraska
- 21= New Hampshire
- 22= New Jersey
- 23= New Mexico
- 24= North Carolina
- 25= Oklahoma
- 26= Oregon
- 27= Rhode Island
- 28= South Carolina
- 29= South Dakota
- 30= Tennessee
- 31= Texas
- 32= Virginia
- 33= West Virginia
- 34= Wyoming I
- 35=Wyoming II

Incumbent: For this variable, you will indicate whether or not the candidate is currently serving in the capacity for which they are campaigning. If the candidate is serving in any position other than the one for which they are campaigning, you will indicate that they are *not* an incumbent senator.

- 1= The candidate is an incumbent senator
- 2= The candidate is not an incumbent senator
- 3= Special election incumbent (Candidate is currently serving in the capacity as a United States Senator, but has not yet been elected to the position.)

Party: Indicate the party affiliation of the candidate whose website you are analyzing. Of the front-running candidates in the 2008 United States Senate elections, there are only three major parties represented.

- 1= Democrat
- 2= Republican
- 3= Green Party

Gender: Indicate the gender of the candidate whose website you are analyzing.

- 1= Female
- 2= Male

Male/Female Dynamic: For this variable, you will indicate whether the candidate whose website you are analyzing is involved in a campaign with both a male and a female candidate.

- 1= The race involves both a male and a female front-running candidate
- 2= The race does not include both a male and a female front-running candidate

Successful Candidate: This variable deals with whether or not the candidate won the 2008 election for United States Senate.

- 1= Yes, the candidate won the election
- 2= No, the candidate did not win the election
- 3= Candidate was involved in a contested or too close to call election, and won
- 4= Candidate was involved in a contested or too close to call election, and lost

Number of Web Pages:

- The number of web pages includes those pages accessible and analyzed by the researcher on the candidate's website. This number does not include the pages that are not analyzed by the researcher. The pages not analyzed by the researcher are those that are consistently updated and changed (e.g. news, candidate blog).

Total Number of Negative Themes:

- The total number of negative themes on all of the web pages analyzed on each candidate's website

Density of negativity Score:

- The total number of negative themes on all candidate websites divided by the total number of web pages on the candidate's website
- 1= 0- 0.99
- 2= 1- 1.99
- 3= 2- 2.99
- 4= 3- 3.99
- 5= 4- 4.99
- 6= 5- 5.99

- 7= 6- 6.99
- 8= 7- 7.99
- 9= 8- 8.99
- 10= 9- 9.99
- 11= 10- 10.99
- 12= 11- 11.99

Candidate Information Form

	Candidate	Region	State	Contest	Incumbent	Party	Gender	M/F Dynamic	Successful Candidate	# Web Pages	# Negative Themes	Density of negativity Score
1	Vivian Figures	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	10	25	2.5= 3
2	Jeff Sessions	3	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	11	0	0= 0
3	Mark Begich	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	12	13	1.08= 2
4	Ted Stevens	4	2	2	1	2	2	2	4	14	27	1.93= 2
5	Rebekah Kennedy	3	3	3	2	3	1	1	2	8	13	1.63= 2
6	Mark Pryor	3	3	3	1	1	2	1	1	7	0	0= 0
7	Bob Schaffer	4	4	4	2	2	2	2	2	12	132	11= 12
8	Mark Udall	4	4	4	2	1	2	2	1	10	20	2= 3
9	Joe Biden	3	5	5	1	1	2	1	1	8	0	0= 0
10	Christine O'Donnell	3	5	5	2	2	1	1	2	11	21	1.91= 2
11	Saxby Chambliss	3	6	6	1	2	2	2	3	7	0	0= 0
12	Jim Martin	3	6	6	2	1	2	2	4	8	91	11.38= 12
13	Larry LaRocco	4	7	7	2	1	2	2	2	4	11	2.75= 3
14	Jim Risch	4	7	7	2	2	2	2	1	10	0	0= 0
15	Dick Durbin	2	8	8	1	1	2	2	1	8	0	0= 0
16	Steve Sauerberg	2	8	8	2	2	2	2	2	9	71	7.89= 8
17	Tom Harkin	2	9	9	1	1	2	2	1	6	4	0.67= 1
18	Christopher Reed	2	9	9	2	2	2	2	2	11	2	0.18= 1
19	Pat Roberts	2	10	10	1	2	2	2	1	10	2	0.2= 1
20	Jim Slattery	2	10	10	2	1	2	2	2	--------	--------	--------
21	Bruce Lunsford	3	11	11	2	1	2	2	2	7	63	9= 10
22	Mitch McConnell	3	11	11	1	2	2	2	1	17	21	1.24= 2
23	John Kennedy	3	12	12	2	2	2	1	2	7	18	2.57= 3
24	Mary Landrieu	3	12	12	1	1	1	1	1	9	30	3.33= 4
25	Tom Allen	1	13	13	2	1	2	1	2	--------	--------	--------

26	Susan Collins	1	13	13	1	2	1	1	1	10	4	0.4=1
27	Jeff Beatty	1	14	14	2	2	2	2	2	12	2	0.17=1
28	John Kerry	1	14	14	1	1	2	2	1	7	0	0=0
29	Jack Hoogendyk	2	15	15	2	2	2	2	2	5	17	3.4=4
30	Carl Levin	2	15	15	1	1	2	2	1	9	0	0=0
31	Norm Coleman	2	16	16	1	2	2	2	4	10	8	0.8=1
32	Al Franken	2	16	16	2	1	2	2	3	9	86	9.56=10
33	Thad Cochran	3	17	17	1	2	2	2	1	3	0	0=0
34	Erik Fleming	3	17	17	2	1	2	2	2	7	4	0.57=1
35	Ronnie Musgrove	3	17	18	2	1	2	2	2	7	22	3.14=4
36	Roger Wicker	3	17	18	3	2	2	2	1	7	1	0.14=1
37	Max Baucus	4	18	19	1	1	2	2	1	10	0	0=0
38	Bob Kelleher	4	18	19	2	2	2	2	2	7	8	1.14=2
39	Mike Johanns	2	19	20	2	2	2	2	1	8	2	0.25=1
40	Scott Kleeb	2	19	20	2	1	2	2	2	9	6	0.67=1
41	Jeanne Shaheen	1	20	21	2	1	1	1	1	7	2	0.29=1
42	John Sununu	1	20	21	1	2	2	1	2	8	2	0.25=1
43	Frank Lautenberg	1	21	22	1	1	2	2	1	8	0	0=0
44	Dick Zimmer	1	21	22	2	2	2	2	2	7	19	2.71=3
45	Steve Pearce	4	22	23	2	2	2	2	2	7	10	1.43=2
46	Tom Udall	4	22	23	2	1	2	2	1	6	6	1=2
47	Elizabeth Dole	3	23	24	1	2	1	2	2	10	29	2.90=3
48	Kay Hagan	3	23	24	2	1	1	2	1	10	76	7.60=8
49	Jim Inhofe	3	24	25	1	2	2	2	1	9	12	1.33=2
50	Andrew Rice	3	24	25	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	0=0
51	Jeff Merkley	4	25	26	2	1	2	2	1	12	24	2=3
52	Gordon Smith	4	25	26	1	2	2	2	2	9	16	1.78=2
53	Jack Reed	1	26	27	1	1	2	2	1	5	0	0=0
54	Robert Tingle	1	26	27	2	2	2	2	2	1	11	11=12

55	Bob Conley	3	27	28	2	1	2	2	2	8	10	1.25=2
56	Lindsey Graham	3	27	28	1	2	2	2	1	6	0	0=0
57	Joel Dykstra	2	28	29	2	2	2	2	2	7	28	4=5
58	Tim Johnson	2	28	29	1	1	2	2	1	7	0	0=0
59	Lamar Alexander	3	29	30	1	2	2	2	1	7	0	0=0
60	Bob Tuke	3	29	30	2	1	2	2	2	6	16	2.67=3
61	John Cornyn	3	30	31	1	2	2	2	1	8	0	0=0
62	Rick Noriega	3	30	31	2	1	2	2	2	8	67	8.38=9
63	Jim Gilmore	3	31	32	2	2	2	2	2	6	23	3.83=4
64	Mark Warner	3	31	32	2	1	2	2	1	--------	--------	--------
65	Jay Rockefeller	3	32	33	1	1	2	2	1	7	0	0=0
66	Jay Wolfe	3	32	33	2	2	2	2	2	--------	--------	--------
67	John Barrasso	4	33	34	3	2	2	2	1	8	0	0=0
68	Nick Carter	4	33	34	2	1	2	2	2	6	1	0.17=1
69	Michael Enzi	4	33	35	1	2	2	2	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
70	Chris Rothfuss	4	33	35	2	1	2	2	2	8	7	0.88=1

APPENDIX D

CODEBOOK: NEGATIVE THEMES ON THE 2008 U. S. SENATE CAMPAIGN WEBSITES

Unit of Analysis: Each unit of analysis will be a negative theme found on a candidate's website. A negative theme is any argument, claim, or assertion made against an opposing candidate on a candidate's website. For example, if one candidate's website has three separate negative themes, you will fill out three separate rows on your code sheet. So, theoretically, one candidate may require three hundred rows, and another candidate may not require any rows.

For the purposes of this research, I will be identifying the negative themes, or units of analysis, for you. I will give each coder a list of negative themes. The list will also include the name of the candidate making the argument, claim, or assertion; the number of the theme; and the prominence of the negative theme. For these items, you will simply transfer the information from the sheet I give you, called the *Negative Theme Code Sheet*, to the corresponding columns on your code sheet. It is important that you transfer all of the information from each row to a row on your code sheet.

A ***negative theme*** is any argument, claim, or assertion that is used by the sponsoring candidate to degrade perceptions of an opponent. It is important to note that not all comments referring to an opposing candidate will be considered *negative themes.* For example, if a website states, "James David is running against incumbent senator John Doe," that would not be considered a negative theme because it does not degrade perceptions of an opponent.

Variables:

1) **Coder ID:** Write in your individual coder ID number for this variable. This ID number was assigned to you by the researcher.

    - 1= Coder 1
    - 2= Coder 2
    - 3= Coder 3

For variables two through five, you will simply be transferring information from the *Negative Theme Code Sheet* provided to you by the researcher to your own code sheet. For each row on the *Negative Theme Code Sheet,* you should have a corresponding row on your own code sheet. When transferring information from one code sheet to the next, it is imperative that information in a row stays together in a corresponding row.

2) **Candidate:** Write the name of the candidate whose negative themes you are analyzing. This will be the corresponding candidate from the *Negative Theme Code Sheet* provided by the researcher.

3) **Theme Number:** For this variable, you will write the number of the theme you are analyzing. This will be the corresponding number from the *Negative Theme Code Sheet* provided by the researcher.

4) **Prominence of Theme:** For this variable, you will write the number provided by the researcher in the corresponding section "Prominence of Theme" on the *Negative Theme Code Sheet.* Be sure that this number comes from the same row on the *Negative Theme Code Sheet* as the "Candidate" and "Theme Number" variables.

The remainder of the variables will require you to analyze the theme provided to you on the *Negative Theme Code Sheet.* As with the previous variables, it is imperative that the information you provide for these variables is contained in the same row of variables as the negative theme you are analyzing.

5) **Type of Negative Theme: Oppositional versus Comparative:** A negative theme is any argument, claim, or assertion that is used by the sponsoring candidate to degrade perceptions of an opponent. For the purposes of this study, we will be examining two types of negative themes: *oppositional* and *comparative.*

An *oppositional negative theme* is an argument, claim, or assertion that puts the opponent in an unfavorable light without comparing the opponent to the sponsoring candidate. For example, the following statement would be considered an oppositional negative theme: "James David is a joke and should not be allowed to serve our country in this capacity."

A *comparative negative theme* is an argument, claim, or assertion in which the sponsoring candidate compares the opponent with himself or herself. An example of a comparative negative theme may be, "James David supports legislation that would close tax loopholes for wealthy corporations, while John Doe supports loopholes and tax breaks for special interests."

- 1= Oppositional negative theme
- 2= Comparative negative theme
- 3= I don't know

6) **Policy vs. Character:** For this variable, you will actually record two responses. For the first response, you will make a general distinction between a policy or character attack. This variable deals with whether the negative theme is against the opponent's policy stance or character.

For the second response to this variable, you will categorize the negative theme based on what you indicated as the first response. So, if you indicated that the theme was based on policy, you will further break the theme down into one of the following: past deeds, future plans, or general goals. If you indicated that the theme was based on character, you will further break the theme down into one of the following: personal qualities, leadership qualities, or ideals. In addition to the definitions below, I have also included sample statements at the end of the codebook. The options are defined as follows (Airne & Benoit, 2005, p. 480; Benoit, 2007, p. 52-54; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 49):

Policy attack: Theme concerns governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action.
Character attack: Theme concerns characteristics, traits, properties, abilities, or attributes of the candidates or their parties.

Under policy attack:
Past deeds: Past deeds concern the outcomes or effects of actions taken by the candidate, usually actions taken as an elected official.
Future plans: Future plans are a means to an end, specific proposals for policy action. For example, if a candidate gives *specifics* about what they want to do while in office, that would constitute a future plan.
General goals: General goals refer to ends rather than means. For example, cutting taxes, without specifying which taxes or how much will be cut, would be indicative of a general goal.
Under character attack:
Personal qualities: Personal qualities refer to the the personality traits of the candidate.
Leadership qualities: Leadership ability generally refers to experience while in office or the ability to accomplish things while in office.
Ideals: Ideals refer to the values or principles of a candidate.

In the first column, you will indicate one of the following:

- 1= Policy attack
- 2= Character attack
- 3= I don't know

In the second column, you will indicate one of the following:

If you chose *Policy* attack in column one:

- 1= Past deeds
- 2= Future plans
- 3= General goals
- 4= I don't know

If you chose *Character* attack in column one:

- 5= Personal qualities
- 6= Leadership qualities

- 7= Ideals
- 8= I don't know

7) **Type of Negative Political Theme:** This variable deals with the specific type of negative theme being analyzed. For this variable, indicate which of the following political themes, if any, is present in the theme being analyzed (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989, p. 891-891).

If none of the nine listed themes is appropriate, you can choose "other" if you clearly see another type of theme being utilized. Or, if you cannot distinguish a specific type of theme, you can respond with "I don't know." If you choose to respond "other," please also write in the margin the category in which you would place the negative theme.

- 1= Political record/Acts in office
- 2= Job experience and Qualifications
- 3= Issue stands and Voting record
- 4= Current/past marriage and Sex life
- 5= Criminal activities
- 6= Family members
- 7= Religion
- 8= Medical history
- 9= Personal life
- 10= Other
- 11= I don't know

To aid in distinguishing between the different forms of policy and character (Variable 8), I have included a list of sample attacks on forms of policy and character taken from *The Primary Decision: A Fundamental Analysis of Debates in Presidential Primaries* by Benoit, Pier, Brazeal, McHale, Klyukovski, & Airne (2002, p. 139-140). These were actual statements by political candidates.

Sample Attacks on Forms of Policy and Character

Policy:

Past Deeds: "We've been closing veterans' hospitals around the country and that's outrageous." (Bauer)

Future Plans: "Governor Bush's plan has not one penny for Social Security, not one penny for Medicare, and not one penny for paying down the national debt." (McCain)

General Goals: "Both Democratic candidates support the idea that the federal government should make all decisions for consumers and the federal government should make all decisions for the provider, that the federal government should ration care." (Bush)

Character:

Personal Qualities: "I speak about the deceit and corruption of this administration." (Hatch)

Leadership Ability: "I'm worried about the country. I'm worried about whether or not we're going to have a continuation of the present leadership. I really want to see the Clinton-Gore team go." (Hatch)

Ideals: "Bill Clinton's not the only one who needs to shape up. We all need to shape up, starting with getting back to our allegiance to the fundamental moral principles that are this nation's strength and that ought to shape its heart." (Keyes)

Variable Definitions and Examples for Coders

Variables five through seven require you to categorize the negative themes provided to you by the researcher. This document provides definitions for each of the possible categories, as well as examples of how they should be applied.

Variable 5

***Oppositional negative theme*:** An oppositional negative theme is an argument, claim, or assertion that puts the opponent in an unfavorable light without comparing the opponent to the sponsoring candidate.
Example: "John Doe is a joke and should not be allowed to serve our country in this capacity."

***Comparative negative theme*:** A comparative negative theme is an argument, claim, or assertion in which the sponsoring candidate compares the opponent with himself or herself.
Example: "James David supports legislation that would close tax loopholes for wealthy corporations, while John Doe supports loopholes and tax breaks for special interests."

Variable 6

Policy attack: Themes concerning governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action (Airne & Benoit, 2005, p. 480; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 49; Benoit, 2007, p. 52-54).
Example: "James David supports legislation that would close tax loopholes for wealthy corporations, while John Doe supports loopholes and tax breaks for special interests."

Past deeds: One of three subcategories of policy remarks; Past deeds concern the outcomes or effects of actions taken by the candidate, usually actions taken as an elected official (Benoit, 2007, p. 52).
Example: "James David irresponsibly used his official power to give an inmate permission to leave prison. In turn, that man murdered an innocent person."

Future plans: One of three subcategories of policy remarks; Future plans are a means to an end, specific proposals for policy action. For example, if a candidate gives *specifics* about what they want to do while in office, that would constitute a future plan (Benoit, 2007, p. 53).
Example: "James David supports legislation that would close tax loopholes for wealthy corporations, while John Doe supports loopholes and tax breaks for special interests."

General goals: One of three subcategories of policy remarks; General goals refer to ends rather than means. For example, cutting taxes, without specifying which taxes or how much will be cut, would be indicative of a general goal (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).
Example: "John Doe supports abortion, and that is something our state will not tolerate."

Character attack: Themes concerning characteristics, traits, properties, abilities, or attributes of candidates or their parties (Airne & Benoit, 2005, p. 480; Benoit, 2007, p. 52-54; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998, p. 49).
Example: "John Doe is a joke and should not be allowed to serve our country in this capacity."

Personal qualities: One of the three subcategories of character remarks; Personal qualities refer to the personality traits of the candidate (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).
Example: "James David refused to visit a children's hospital while he was in Washington D.C. He decided instead to have a few beers at a professional football game."

Leadership qualities: One of the three subcategories of character remarks; Leadership ability generally refers to experience while in office or the ability to accomplish things while in office (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).
Example: "John Doe is a joke and should not be allowed to serve our country in this capacity."

Ideals: One of the three subcategories of character remarks; Ideals refer to the values or principles of a candidate (Benoit, 2007, p. 54).
Example: "James David doesn't value life."

Variable 7

Political record/Acts in office: Refers to any official acts conducted of a political nature while in office, not including voting record.
Example: "James David irresponsibly used his official power to give an inmate permission to leave prison. In turn, that man murdered an innocent person."

Job experience and Qualifications: Refers to professional qualifications possessed or job positions held, or lack thereof.
Example: "John Doe has absolutely no experience applicable to serving in this position."

Issue stands and Voting record: Includes general and specific stances on political and social issues, as well as how an individual voted on such issues.
Example: "James David supports legislation that would close tax loopholes for wealthy corporations, while John Doe supports loopholes and tax breaks for special interests."

Current/past marriage and Sex life: Refers to any theme explicitly dealing with an individual's current marriage, past marriage, or sex life.
Example: "It is no secret that John Doe's entire staff is made up of his mistresses."

Criminal activities: Refers to a suggestion, accusation, or statement involving illegal activity, whether related to official business or not.

Example: "Have the people of our state already forgotten that Mr. Doe was convicted of a DUI only five years ago?"

Family members: Refers to a negative theme dealing with an individual's family members, but does not include references to a candidate's marriage.
Example: "James David's brother is in prison serving time for insider trading."

Religion: Refers to a comment about an individual's religious affiliations, beliefs, or rituals, or to an individual's lack thereof.
Example: "Can someone with Mr. Doe's religious background truly understand the Christian values the people of our state hold most important?"

Medical history: Refers to a negative theme dealing with an individual's medical history, including diagnoses and medical procedures.
Example: "Can our state afford having someone in Mr. David's condition in office? What if he has yet another heart attack?"

Personal life: Refers to a negative theme dealing with an individual's personal life, including personal affiliations and past actions, but excluding job experience and qualifications, marriages, sex life, criminal activities, family members, religion, and medical history.
Example: "John Doe served on a board of directors with a convicted murderer."

Examples of Negative Theme Coding

As a coder, you will be given a completed *Negative Theme Code Sheet* and a blank *Code Sheet.* Here is an example of how a completed *Negative Theme Code Sheet* may look and how you would transfer and analyze data on your own Code Sheet.

Negative Theme Code Sheet

Candidate	# of Theme	Prominence of Theme	Negative Theme
John Doe	1	5	We all know that Bob Davis cheated on his taxes. John Doe, however, has always has his country's best interest in mind.
John Doe	2	4	Davis has never served in this capacity. He simply isn't qualified for the job.
John Doe	3	1	Davis has big oil's best interest in mind. Doe has your best interest in mind.
John Doe	4	3	My opponent supported banning all firearms. How safe would you feel if the only people who had guns in our country were the criminals who obtained them illegally?
Bob Davis	1	5	Clearly John Doe thinks taking your hard-earned money is in the best interest of our country. I think that is in the best interest of Mr. Doe. I think you should be able to decide what to do with the money that you earn.

Code Sheet

	Coder ID	Candidate	Theme Number	Prominence of Theme	Oppositional vs. Comparative	Policy vs. Character		Type of Political Theme
1	5	John Doe	1	5	2	2	7	5
2	5	John Doe	2	4	1	2	6	2
3	5	John Doe	3	1	2	1	3	3
4	5	John Doe	4	3	1	1	1	3
5	5	Bob Davis	1	5	2	1	3	3

APPENDIX E

CODE SHEET

Unit of measurement= Occurrence of a negative theme

	Coder ID	Candidate	Theme Number	Prominence of Theme	Oppositional vs. Comparative	Policy vs. Character		Type of Political Theme
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE ATTACKS ON FORMS OF POLICY AND CHARACTER

Policy:

Past Deeds: "We've been closing veterans' hospitals around the country and that's outrageous." (Bauer)

Future Plans: "Governor Bush's plan has not one penny for Social Security, not one penny for Medicare, and not one penny for paying down the national debt." (McCain)

General Goals: "Both Democratic candidates support the idea that the federal government should make all decisions for consumers and the federal government should make all decisions for the provider, that the federal government should ration care." (Bush)

Character:

Personal Qualities: "I speak about the deceit and corruption of this administration." (Hatch)

Leadership Ability: "I'm worried about the country. I'm worried about whether or not we're going to have a continuation of the present leadership. I really want to see the Clinton-Gore team go." (Hatch)

Ideals: "Bill Clinton's not the only one who needs to shape up. We all need to shape up, starting with getting back to our allegiance to the fundamental moral principles that are this nation's strength and that ought to shape its heart." (Keyes)

(Benoit, Pier, Brazeal, McHale, Klyukovski, & Airne, 2002, p. 139-140)

APPENDIX G

ADDITIONAL VARIABLES OF INTEREST

Additional Variables and Definitions

Region: This variable deals with the geographical region of the United States in which each candidate was campaigning for the United States Senate. The United States Census Bureau divides the United States into four regions: the Northeast, the Midwest, the South, and the West. The Northeast region includes the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. The Midwest region includes the states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri. The South region includes Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. The West region includes the states of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii.

State: This variable indicates the state in which the candidate was campaigning for a United States Senate seat. Thirty-three states were included in this content analysis.

Contest: This variable indicates the political contests in which the candidates were campaigning. Each contest includes two candidates. This content analysis includes 34 contests in 33 different states.

Incumbent: This variable indicates whether or not the candidate was serving in the capacity for which they were campaigning. If the candidates were serving in any

position other than the ones for which they were campaigning, they were *not* considered incumbent senators. In addition, special election incumbents were identified. Special election incumbents were candidates who were currently serving in the capacity as a United States Senator, but had not yet been elected to the position.

Party: This variable indicates the party affiliation of the candidate whose website is being analyzed. Of the front-running candidates in the 2008 United States Senate elections, only three major parties are represented: the Democratic party, the Republican party, and the Green party.

Gender: This variable indicates the gender of the candidate being analyzed.

Male/Female Dynamic: This variable indicates whether or not the candidate whose website is being analyzed is involved in a campaign with both a male and a female candidate.

Successful Candidate: This variable deals with whether or not the candidate won the 2008 election for United States Senate.

Number of Web Pages: This refers to the total number of web pages included and analyzed on the candidates' websites. However, this number excludes those pages not analyzed by the researcher on the candidates' websites. The pages not included in this number and not analyzed by the researcher are those that are consistently updated and changed (e.g. news, candidate blog).

Number of Negative Themes: This refers to the total number of negative themes identified on all of the web pages analyzed on each candidate's website.

Density of Negativity Score: The density of negativity score is a measure of the denseness of negativity on candidate websites. The density of negativity score is

calculated by dividing the total number of negative themes identified on each candidate's website by the total number of web pages analyzed on each candidate's website. A higher density of negativity score indicates a more densely negative candidate website. A lower density of negativity score indicates a less densely negative candidate website.

Prominence/Placement of Negative Theme: This variable deals with where the negative theme is located on the website. Specifically, this variable concerns how many levels the negative theme is from the website's home page. Each time the visitor to the website must click to access the negative theme, the click is counted as a level. The total number of levels indicates the prominence of the negative theme. Fewer levels indicate more prominent negative themes; more levels indicate less prominent themes. This variable was developed from Yun, Postelnicu, Ramoutar, and Kaid (2007).

Frequencies of Additional Variables

Region

The South was the most negative region with 50.1 percent of the negative themes. The West had 25.4 percent of the negative themes. The Midwest held 20.8 percent of the negative themes. The Northeast had the fewest number of negative themes, with only 3.7 percent (see Table G1).

Incumbency

Incumbency proved to be an important variable with regard to the use of negative themes on candidate websites. Nine-hundred twenty-eight of the 1084 negative themes were identified on challengers' websites (85.6%). One-hundred fifty-five of the 1084 negative themes identified were found on incumbents' websites (14.3%) (see Table G1).

Party

Democratic candidates were responsible for 54 percent of the negative themes, while Republican candidates were responsible for 44.8 percent of the negative themes (see Table G1).

Gender

While female candidate websites accounted for 12 percent of the websites examined, 18.5 percent of the negative themes identified were found on female candidates' websites. Websites of male candidates accounted for 87.7 percent of the websites examined, and 81.5 percent of the negative themes were identified on male candidates' websites. Therefore, while a larger percentage of the overall negative themes identified were found on male candidate websites, female candidates tended to be more negative than male candidates (see Table G1).

Male/Female Dynamic

The majority of Senate contests in 2008 were between male candidates. Seventeen percent, or 6 of 35 of the contests included a male/female dynamic. One contest was between female candidates, and 28 of the contests, or 80 percent, were between male candidates. Contests with a male/female dynamic had a smaller percentage of negative themes, as they made up 17 percent of the contests, but only 10.6 percent of the negative themes. Contests between same-sex candidates made up 82.8 percent of the elections, but 89.4 percent of the negative themes (see Table G1).

Success of Candidate

An overwhelming majority of negative themes identified were found on unsuccessful candidates' websites. Seventy-two percent of the negative themes were

identified on unsuccessful candidates' websites, compared with 28% of negative themes identified on successful candidates' websites (see Table G1). While an association was identified between successful candidates (or candidates winning elections) and use of negative themes, causation is not implied.

Density of Negativity

In an effort to develop a measure of the density of negativity for each candidate, the total number of negative themes on each candidate's website was divided by the total number of pages on the candidate's website. This number, or score, indicates the density of negativity for each candidate. A higher number indicates a high density of negativity; a lower number indicates a low density of negativity. Over a third of the negative themes identified were found on the websites of candidates with the two highest densities of negativity. Only 4.3% of the negative themes identified were found on the websites of candidates with the lowest density of negativity (see Table G1).

Prominence of Negative Theme

The majority of negative themes were identified on the second level of the candidates' websites. Only 7.6 percent of the negative themes were identified on the candidates' homepages. Almost 60 percent of the negative themes were identified on the second level of the websites, 22.3 percent were identified on the third level of the websites, 3.2 percent were identified on the fourth level of the websites, 1.9 percent were identified on the fifth level of the websites, and 5.2 percent were identified on the sixth level of the websites or higher (see Table G1).

Elaborating on RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3

RQ1

To elaborate on RQ1, chi square tests were performed to determine the relationship between oppositional and comparative negative themes and region, oppositional and comparative negative themes and incumbency, oppositional and comparative negative themes and party, oppositional and comparative negative themes and gender, oppositional and comparative negative themes and male/female dynamic, oppositional and comparative negative themes and success of the candidate, oppositional and comparative negative themes and density of negativity, and oppositional and comparative negative themes and theme prominence.

Statistically significant differences were observed in the distribution of oppositional and comparative negative themes by region ($x^2[3] = 132.6, p < .001$). Candidates in the South (4.90) and Northeast (4.71) appear to have used more oppositional themes when compared to the Midwest (3.91). The West was marked by low use of oppositional negative themes (0.87) (see Table G2).

Statistically significant differences were observed among political party ($x^2[2] = 47.6, p < .001$). The Green Party candidate (5.5) and the Democratic Party candidates (4.37) appear to have used more oppositional negative themes than candidates from the Republican Party (1.69) (see Table G2). While both Democrats and Republicans had more oppositional comments than comparative, Democrats had a ratio over two and half times higher than Republicans (see Table G2).

Statistically significant differences were observed among the different levels of prominence of the negative themes on candidate-sponsored websites ($x^2[5] = 102.9, p <$

.001). The highest ratio of oppositional to comparative themes was observed on level six or higher (8.33) of the website pages. Level five (6.0) had the second highest ratio of oppositional to comparative themes with level four (4.0), level two (3.91), and level one (3.56) following. Level three (0.92) had the lowest ratio of oppositional to comparative themes. These results indicate that candidates either displayed oppositional negative themes on the initial pages of their websites, or they placed them in less conspicuous website pages (see Table G2). Level three was characterized by more comparative negative themes than oppositional.

Significance was observed with regard to oppositional and comparative themes and density of negativity ($x^2[8] = 101.5, p = < .001$). The highest ratios of oppositional to comparative themes were identified on websites for candidates with densities of negativity from 8- 8.99 (12.6) and from 9- 9.99 (10.5). These ratios were much higher than those identified on websites of candidates with densities of negativity from 0- 0.99 (1.76), from 1- 1.99 (2.57), from 2- 2.99 (2.86), from 3- 3.99 (3.38), from 4- 4.99 (4.60), from 7- 7.99 (3.74), and from 11- 11.99 (1.05) (see Table G2). Negative themes identified on websites of candidates with the highest density of negativity had the lowest ratio of oppositional to comparative themes. Negative themes identified on websites of candidates with the second and third highest densities of negativity, however, had the highest ratios of oppositional to comparative negative themes. These ratios were over ten times higher than the ratio for candidates with the highest density of negativity.

Significance was not observed with regard to oppositional and comparative themes and incumbency ($x^2[1] = 0.34, p = .561$), gender ($x^2[1] = 3.7, p = .055$), male/female dynamic ($x^2[1] = .782, p = .377$), or success of the candidate ($x^2[1] = 3.7, p$

= .054) (see Table G2). With regard to incumbency, challengers had almost six times the number of negative themes than incumbents. Challengers also had a higher ratio of oppositional negative themes to comparative (see Table G2). While successful candidates (candidates who won their elections) had a higher ratio of oppositional to comparative negative themes, they had less than half of the amount of negative themes (see Table G2).

RQ2

To elaborate on RQ2, chi square tests were performed to determine the relationship between policy- and character-based negative themes and region, policy- and character-based negative themes and incumbency, policy- and character-based negative themes and party, policy- and character-based negative themes and gender, policy- and character-based negative themes and male/female dynamic, policy- and character-based negative themes and success of the candidate, policy- and character-based negative themes and density of negativity, and policy- and character-based negative themes and theme prominence.

Policy and Character Crosstabulations. Statistically significant differences were observed with regard to policy and character and region ($x^2[6] = 18.8, p = .004$). Candidates from the West (0.99) and the Northeast (0.90) had higher ratios of policy to character negative themes than candidates from the South (0.75) and the Midwest (0.46) (see Table G3). Candidates in the Northeast and West had almost as many policy-based themes as character-based themes, while candidates in the Midwest had over twice as many character-based themes as policy-based.

Statistical significance was observed with regard to policy and character and incumbency ($x^2[2] = 31.8, p < .001$). Challengers (0.85) were more likely to use policy negative themes than were incumbents (0.28) (see Table G3).

Statistical significance was observed in the distribution of policy and character negative themes with regard to gender ($x^2[2] = 10.04, p = .007$). Male candidates (0.81) had higher ratios of policy to character than female candidates (0.48) (see Table G3). Statistical significance was observed in the distribution of policy and character negative themes and success of candidates ($x^2[2] = 60.2, p < .001$). Unsuccessful candidates (candidates who lost their elections) (0.98) had a higher ratio of policy to character negative themes than did successful candidates (candidates who won their elections) (0.31) (see Table G3).

Statistical significance was observed in the distribution of policy and character negative themes and density of negativity ($x^2[16] = 109.7, p < .001$). The highest ratio of policy to character negative themes was observed in the highest density of negativity, using over two times as many policy-based themes as character-based (2.08). The remaining ratios of policy to character negative themes are as follows: lowest density of negativity (0.34), second density of negativity (0.51), third density of negativity (0.72), fourth density of negativity (0.44), fifth density of negativity (0.22), eighth density of negativity (0.52), ninth density of negativity (1.09), and eleventh density of negativity (0.51) (see Table G3).

Statistical significance was observed in the distribution of policy and character negative themes and theme prominence ($x^2[10] = 118.8, p < .001$). Negative themes on the third level of candidate-sponsored websites (2.13) had the highest ratio of policy to

character negative themes, followed by level 5 (0), level 2 (0.64), level 1 (0.49), level 6 and higher (0.27), and level 4 (0.06) (see Table G3). So, buried in between website levels with ratios highlighting the use of more character-based negative themes than policy-based, level three had more than twice as many policy-based negative themes than character-based (see Table G3).

Significance was not observed with regard to policy and character and party ($x^2[4] = 6.98$, $p = .137$) or male/female dynamic ($x^2[2] = 4.3$, $p = .116$) (see Table G3). Further, and contrary to the overall statistics, candidates involved in a contest with a male/female dynamic used more policy-based negative themes than character-based negative themes (see Table G3).

Subclassification of Policy and Character Crosstabulations. Statistical significance was identified with regard to policy and character sub-classification crosstabs and region ($x^2[18] = 105.05$, $p < .001$). Over half of the negative policy themes identified on websites for candidates in the Northeast, Midwest, and South were based on past deeds (see Table G4), while over 70 percent of the negative policy themes for candidates in the West were based on general goals. Over half of the negative character themes identified on websites for candidates in the Midwest, South, and West were based on ideals (see Table G5).

Significance was identified with regard to policy and character sub-classifications and incumbency ($x^2[6] = 35.2$, $p < .001$). Incumbents favored using policy themes concerning general goals, while challengers used more policy themes concerning past deeds (see Table G4). Both incumbents and challengers used a majority of negative character themes dealing with ideals (see Table G5).

Statistical significance was identified regarding policy and character sub-classifications and political party ($x^2[12] = 58.1$, $p < .001$). Democrats used more negative policy themes concerning past deeds, while Republicans used more negative policy themes concerning general goals (see Table G4). Over 50 percent of negative character themes used by both Democrats and Republicans dealt with ideals (see Table G5).

Significance was observed concerning policy and character negative themes and gender ($x^2[6] = 25.1$, $p < .001$). Both males and females used more negative policy themes dealing with past deeds than with future deeds or general goals (see Table G4). Both males and females used more negative character themes dealing with ideals (see Table G5).

Statistical significance was observed with regard to policy and character sub-classifications and candidate success ($x^2[6] = 103.9$, $p < .001$). Unsuccessful candidates (candidates who lost their elections) used over five times as many negative policy themes as successful candidates (candidates who won their elections). Unsuccessful candidates also used a higher percentage of negative policy themes regarding past deeds than did successful candidates (see Table G4). Both successful and unsuccessful candidates used more negative character themes regarding ideals than negative character themes dealing with personal qualities or leadership qualities (see Table G5).

Statistical significance was observed concerning policy and character sub-classifications and density of negativity ($x^2[48] = 294.3$, $p < .001$). Candidates with the highest and lowest densities of negativity had the highest percentage of negative policy themes concerning general goals than did other candidates. Over 58 percent of negative

policy themes on websites from candidates with the lowest density of negativity concerned general goals, compared with 67.1 percent from candidates with the highest density of negativity. Over half of the negative policy themes used by candidates with a density of negativity from 1 to 10.0 dealt with past deeds (see Table G4). The majority of negative character themes dealt with ideals for candidates with densities of negativity from zero to 3.99 and from 7 and up. Candidates with a density of negativity between 4 and 4.99 had a higher percentage of negative character themes regarding leadership qualities (see Table G5).

Significance was observed with regard to policy and character sub-classifications and theme prominence ($x^2[30] = 205.1, p < .001$). Levels one and two showed higher percentages of negative policy themes regarding past deeds than negative policy themes dealing with future deeds or general goals. Level three had a higher percentage of negative policy themes concerning general goals. Levels four and six were split evenly between past deeds and general goals, while no negative policy themes were identified on level five of any candidate's website (see Table G4). Negative character themes on every level showed their highest percentages dealt with candidate ideals (see Table G5).

Significance was not observed with regard to the sub-classifications of policy and character and male/female dynamic ($x^2[6] = 11.7, p = .069$).

RQ3

To elaborate on RQ3, chi square tests were performed to determine the relationship between type of negative theme and region, type of negative theme and incumbency, type of negative theme and party, type of negative theme and gender, type of negative theme and male/female dynamic, type of negative theme and success of the

candidate, type of negative theme and density of negativity, and type of negative theme and theme prominence.

Statistically significant differences were identified among negative theme type and region ($x^2[18] = 117.9, p < .001$). The South (18.2%) had the highest individual percentage of negative themes regarding political record. The Northeast (27.5%) had the highest individual percentage of negative themes regarding job experience (27.5%) and issue stands (47.5%). The West (3.3%) had the only negative themes regarding criminal activity, while the South (0.4%) had the only negative themes dealing with religion. The West (25.1%) had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with personal life, and the Midwest (26.1%) had the highest individual percentage of negative themes coded as other (see Table G6).

Statistical significance was identified among negative themes and incumbency ($x^2[6] = 44.1, p < .001$). While challengers had a higher overall number of negative themes, incumbents had higher individual percentages of negative themes dealing with job experience (21.8%), personal life (30.1%), and other (25.6%). Challengers had higher individual percentages of negative themes dealing with political record (14.8%), issue stands (33.5%), criminal activities (1.0%), and religion (0.2%) (see Table G6).

Statistical significance was observed among negative theme type and party ($x^2[12] = 111.03, p < .001$). Democrats had the only instances of negative themes dealing with criminal activities (1.5%) and religion (0.3%). Democrats also had the highest individual percentage of negative themes identified as other (22.4). Republicans had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with job experience (19.1%), issue stands (40.5%), and personal life (26.1%). The Green Party had the highest

individual percentage of negative themes dealing with political record (30.8%) (see Table G6).

Statistical significance was observed among negative themes and gender ($x^2[6] = 69.5, p < .001$). Females had higher individual percentages of negative themes that dealt with political record (16.5%) and other (30.5%). Females had the only instances of negative themes dealing with religion (1.0%), while males had the only instances of negative themes dealing with criminal activities (1.0%). Males had higher individual percentages of negative themes dealing with job experience (16.9%), issue stands (33.9%), and personal life (24.4%) (see Table G6).

Statistically significant differences were observed among negative themes and the male/female dynamic ($x^2[6] = 14.9, p = .021$). Contests where a male/female dynamic was present had higher individual percentages of negative themes with regard to political record (22.6%), issue stands (31.3%), and other (17.4%). Contests where a male/female dynamic was not present had higher individual percentages of negative themes dealing with job experience (17.3%), criminal activities (0.9%), religion (0.2%), and personal life (23.7%) (see Table G6).

Statistically significant differences were observed among negative themes and success of the candidate ($x^2[6] = 227.4, p < .001$). Successful candidates (candidates who won their elections) used the only negative themes dealing with criminal activities (3.0%) and religion (0.7%). Successful candidates had the highest individual percentage of negative themes coded as other (38.3%), almost seven times higher than unsuccessful candidates. Unsuccessful candidates had higher individual percentages of negative

themes dealing with political record (15.1%), job experience (18.2%), issue stands (36.2%), and personal life (24.6%) (see Table G6).

Statistical significance was observed among negative themes and density of negativity ($x^2[48] = 291.1$, $p < .001$). Candidates with the highest density of negativity had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with political record (20.5%) and the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with issue stands and voting record (47.4%). Candidates with the second density of negativity had the only negative themes dealing with criminal activities (5.7%). Candidates with the fifth density of negativity had the highest individual percentage of negative themes with regard to job experience (53.6%). Candidates with the sixth density of negativity had the only negative themes dealing with religion (0.3%) (see Table G6).

Statistically significant differences were observed among negative themes and theme prominence ($x^2[30] = 296.5$, $p < .001$). Negative themes on level one of candidate websites had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with job experience (24.4%). Level two had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with political record (15.7%) and the only negative themes dealing with religion (0.3%). Level three had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with issue stands (59.1%) and criminal activities (2.9%). Level four had the highest individual percentage of negative themes dealing with personal life (42.9%). Level five had the highest individual percentage of negative themes coded as other (66.7%) (see Table G6).

What Factors are Associated with Types of Negative Themes on Candidate Websites?

To most effectively answer this question, frequencies, descriptive statistics, and a series of regression analyses were used. The regression analyses were performed in order to determine if density of negativity, prominence of negative themes, use of oppositional or comparative themes, and use of policy-based or character-based themes can be used to predict the success of a candidate.

Regression Analyses

Results of the regression analyses indicate that both density of negativity used by a candidate, $\beta = .193$, $t = 6.52$, $p < .001$, and prominence of negative themes on candidate websites, $\beta = -.346$, $t = -11.68$, $p < .001$, can be used to predict the success of a candidate in an election. Use of oppositional versus comparative negative themes and use of policy-based versus character-based negative themes did not significantly predict the success of a candidate in an election (see Table G7).

As the density of negativity increased, the success of a candidate decreased. As prominence of negative themes increased, the success of a candidate decreased. This regression shows that a candidate decreased his or her potential for a successful campaign by displaying a website that was densely negative and prominently displayed negative themes.

Variables

Based on the results of the statistical analyses, certain variables were associated with certain types of negative themes.

Region. Candidates in the Northeast used 3.7 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes were likely to be oppositional and character-based. Of the policy-based negative themes, the majority were based on past deeds. Of the character-based themes, the majority were based on ideals. The highest percentage of negative theme types were based on issue stands (see Table G8).

Candidates in the Midwest used 20.8 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes were likely to be oppositional and character-based. The policy-based negative themes were likely to be based on past deeds, while the character-based negative themes were most likely based on candidate ideals. Of the negative themes identified for candidates in the Midwest, the majority were coded as "other" under negative theme type (see Table G8).

The majority of negative themes identified were on websites for candidates in the South (50.1%). These themes were likely to be oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based themes were based on past deeds. The majority of character-based themes were based on candidate ideals. The highest percentage of negative theme type was issue stands (see Table G8).

Candidates from the West accounted for 25.4 percent of the total number of negative themes. The majority of these themes were comparative and character-based. The highest percentage of policy-based negative themes concerned general goals, and the highest percentage of character-based negative themes concerned candidate ideals. The most common negative theme type dealt with issue stands (see Table G8).

Incumbency. Incumbents accounted for 14.3 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes tended to be oppositional and character-based. Policy-

based negative themes were most likely based on general goals. Character-based themes were most likely based on ideals. The highest percentage of negative theme type concerned the opposing candidate's personal life (see Table G8).

Challengers accounted for 85.6 percent of the negative themes. The majority of these themes were oppositional and character-based. Policy-based themes were likely to deal with past deeds, while character-based themes were likely based on ideals. The majority of negative theme type was issue stands (see Table G8).

Party. Democrats accounted for 54 percent of the total number of negative themes, while Republicans accounted for 44.8 percent. For both Democrats and Republicans, the majority of these themes were oppositional and character-based. For policy-based negative themes, Democrats had a majority of themes dealing with past deeds, while Republicans were more likely to use themes dealing with general goals. For character-based negative themes, both Republicans and Democrats used a majority of themes dealing with candidate ideals. For negative theme type, both Republicans and Democrats had a majority of themes concerning issue stands (see Table G8).

Gender. Male candidates accounted for 81.5 percent of negative themes, while female candidates were responsible for 18.5 percent. Both male and female candidates had a majority of oppositional, character-based themes. For both genders, policy-based negative themes likely concerned past deeds, while character-based negative themes likely concerned candidate ideals. For negative theme type, males used more themes dealing with issue stands, while females had a majority of negative themes coded as "other" (see Table G8). Male candidates reached higher densities of negativity than female candidates, with no female candidates reaching a density of negativity over 7.99.

Male/Female Dynamic. Candidates involved in a contest with a male/female dynamic accounted for 10.6 percent of the total number of negative themes. The majority of these themes were oppositional and policy-based. The majority of policy-based themes concerned past deeds, while the majority of character-based themes concerned ideals. In addition, the majority of these negative themes dealt with issue stands.

Candidates not involved in a contest with a male/female dynamic accounted for 89.4 percent of the negative themes. These themes were likely to be oppositional and character-based. Policy-based themes were most likely based on past deeds, and character-based themes were most likely based on candidate ideals. The highest percentage of negative theme type dealt with issue stands (see Table G8).

Candidate Success. Successful candidates (candidates who won their elections) were responsible for 28 percent of the total number of negative themes identified on candidate websites, while unsuccessful candidates (candidates who lost their elections) were responsible for 72 percent. The majority of negative themes for both successful and unsuccessful candidates were oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based negative themes for both successful and unsuccessful candidates concerned past deeds. The majority of character-based negative themes for both successful and unsuccessful candidates concerned candidate ideals. Unsuccessful candidates were more likely to use issue stands as a negative theme type, and successful candidates had a majority of negative themes coded as "other" (see Table G8).

Density of Negativity. Candidates with the lowest density of negativity (0- 0.99) were responsible for 4.3 percent of the total number of negative themes. Negative themes in this category were likely oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-

based themes in this category dealt with general goals, while the majority of character-based themes in this category dealt with candidate ideals. For candidates with the lowest density of negativity, the highest percentage of negative themes dealt with candidate job experience (see Table G8).

Candidates with a density of negativity from 1 to 1.99 were responsible for 14.5 percent, while candidates with a density of negativity from 2 to 2.99 were responsible for 14.9 percent. Negative themes by candidates in these categories were likely to be oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based themes concerned past deeds, while the majority of character-based themes concerned candidate ideals. The majority of negative theme types in these categories dealt with issue stands (see Table G8).

Candidates with a density of negativity from 3 to 3.99 accounted for 8.5 percent of the negative themes. The majority of these themes were oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based themes concerned past deeds, and the majority of character-based themes concerned candidate ideals. The highest percentage of negative theme type for candidates in this category dealt with the opposing candidate's personal life (see Table G8).

Candidates with a density of negativity from 4 to 4.99 were responsible for 2.6 percent of the negative themes. The majority of these themes were oppositional and character-based. Policy-based themes most likely dealt with past deeds, while character-based themes most likely dealt with leadership qualities. The majority of negative theme types in this category concerned candidate job experience (see Table G8).

No candidates had densities of negativity between 5 and 6.99. Candidates with densities of negativity from 7 to 7.99 accounted for 13.6 of negative themes overall. All of these candidates were from the Midwest and the South, and none of the candidates were incumbents.

Candidates with densities of negativity from 8 to 8.99 accounted for 6.3%, and candidates with densities of negativity from 9 to 9.99 accounted for 13.7% of total negative themes overall. These themes were likely to be oppositional. Candidates in these categories were all challengers, all Democrats, and all male. Candidates with densities of negativity from 8- 8.99 were all unsuccessful in their elections.

Candidates with the highest densities of negativity (11- 11.99) were responsible for 21.6 percent of the total number of negative themes identified on candidate websites. These themes were likely oppositional and policy-based. The majority of the policy-based themes concerned general goals, and the majority of character-based themes concerned candidate ideals. The highest percentage of negative theme type for candidates with the high density of negativity dealt with issue stands and voting record. Candidates with the highest density of negativity were all challengers, all male, and all unsuccessful in the election (see Table G8).

Theme Prominence. Negative themes identified on the first level of candidate websites accounted for 7.6 percent of the negative themes. These prominent themes tended to be oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based negative themes dealt with past deeds. The majority of character-based negative themes dealt with ideals. The majority of negative themes on the first level of websites dealt with issue stands and the opposing candidate's personal life (see Table G8).

Negative themes identified on level two of candidate websites accounted for 59.8 percent of the total number of negative themes. The majority of level two negative themes were oppositional and character-based. Most of the policy-based negative themes concerned past deeds, while most of the character-based negative themes concerned candidate ideals. The majority of negative themes were based on issue stands (see Table G8).

Negative themes identified on level three of candidate websites accounted for 22.3 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes tended to be comparative and policy-based. The majority of policy-based negative themes dealt with general goals, and the majority of character-based negative themes dealt with candidate ideals. The majority of negative themes were based on issue stands (see Table G8).

Level four negative themes accounted for 3.2 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes were likely oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based themes concerned past deeds and general goals. The majority of character-based themes concerned ideals. The most common negative theme type on level four of candidate websites concerned the opposing candidate's personal life (see Table G8).

Negative themes identified on level five of candidate websites accounted for only 1.9 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes were likely oppositional and character-based. No policy-based negative themes were identified on level five of the candidates' websites. The majority of character-based negative themes concerned candidate ideals. The majority of negative themes were coded as "other" (see Table G8).

Negative themes identified on level six or higher of candidate websites accounted for 5.2 percent of the total number of negative themes. These themes were likely oppositional and character-based. The majority of policy-based negative themes dealt with past deeds and general goals. The majority of character-based negative themes dealt with candidate ideals. The most common type of negative theme on level six or higher of candidate websites was coded as "other" (see Table G8).

Implications of Additional Data

Implications for Practice

Success of Political Candidates. Knowing the profile of a successful political candidate is helpful to political candidates and their staffs. Demonstrating the characteristics of candidates who win elections can help a political candidate to become successful in elections, as well. For example, successful candidates used fewer negative themes overall than unsuccessful candidates (see Table G1). Among the negative themes identified on successful candidates' websites, the majority were more oppositional (see Table G2) and more character-based (see Table G3) than those of unsuccessful candidates. Further, the policy-based negative themes identified on successful candidate websites contained more general goal statements, while those of unsuccessful candidates focused more on past deeds (see Table G4). At the same time, character-based negative themes identified on successful candidates' websites focused more on ideals than did those of unsuccessful candidates (see Table G5). Candidates with the highest density of negativity were all unsuccessful candidates. In short, certain variables were associated with successful candidates. Further, a regression analysis revealed that a candidate's high

density of negativity, as well as prominent negative themes on candidate websites predicted a candidate's unsuccessful campaign.

Implications for Communication Theory

Formula for Assessing Density of Negativity. Because no formula for assessing a candidate's density of negativity existed prior to conducting the current research, a formula was developed. To assess a candidate's density of negativity, the total number of negative themes identified on a candidate's website is divided by the total number of web pages on the website. This score indicates how densely negative a candidate's website is. This simple mathematical formula is an effective way to compare the density of negativity on candidate websites. This contribution will be helpful as other research is conducted on negativity on candidate-sponsored websites.

Negativity Profiles of Political Candidates. Findings from the current research study include profiles of political candidates. Profiles were created based on candidate region, incumbency, political party, gender, participation in a contest with a male/female dynamic, success of a candidate, candidate's density of negativity, and theme prominence. These profiles can be helpful for comparison with previous and future research findings.

Table G1

Frequencies of Variables

Variable	Frequency
Region	
Northeast	40 (3.7%)
Midwest	226 (20.8%)
South	543 (50.1%)
West	275 (25.4%)
Incumbent	
Yes	155 (14.3%)
No	928 (85.6%)
Party	
Democrat	585 (54.0%)
Republican	486 (44.8%)
Green	13 (1.2%)
Gender	
Female	200 (18.5%)
Male	884 (81.5%)
Male/Female Dynamic	
Yes	115 (10.6%)
No	969 (89.4%)
Successful Candidate	
Yes	303 (28.0%)
No	781 (72.0%)

Table G1 (continued).

Variable	Frequency
Density of Negativity	
0-0.99	47 (4.3%)
1-1.99	157 (14.5%)
2-2.99	162 (14.9%)
3-3.99	92 (8.5%)
4- 4.99	28 (2.6%)
5- 5.99	0
6- 6.99	0
7- 7.99	147 (13.6%)
8- 8.99	68 (6.3%)
9- 9.99	149 (13.7%)
10- 10.99	0
11- 11.99	234 (21.6%)
Theme Prominence	
Level 1	82 (7.6%)
Level 2	648 (59.8%)
Level 3	242 (22.3%)
Level 4	35 (3.2%)
Level 5	21 (1.9%)
Level 6+	56 (5.2%)
Total	1084

Table G2

Cross Tabulation of Oppositional and Comparative Negative Themes

	Oppositional	Comparative	Oppositional:Comparative	Total
Region				
Northeast	33	7	4.71	40
Midwest	180	46	3.91	226
South	451	92	4.90	543
West	128	147	0.87	275
Incumbent				
Yes	111	45	2.47	156
No	681	247	2.76	928
Party				
Democrat	476	109	4.37	585
Republican	305	181	1.69	486
Green	11	2	5.50	13
Gender				
Female	157	43	3.65	200
Male	635	249	2.55	884
Male/Female Dynamic				
Yes	88	27	3.26	115
No	704	265	2.66	969
Successful Candidate				
Yes	234	69	3.39	303
No	558	223	2.50	781

Table G2 (continued).

	Oppositional	Comparative	Oppositional:Comparative	Total
Density of Negativity				
0-0.99	30	17	1.76	47
1-1.99	113	44	2.57	157
2-2.99	120	42	2.86	162
3-3.99	71	21	3.38	92
4-4.99	23	5	4.60	28
5-5.99	0	0	0.00	0
6-6.99	0	0	0.00	0
7-7.99	116	31	3.74	147
8-8.99	63	5	12.60	68
9-9.99	136	13	10.50	149
10-10.99	0	0	0.00	0
11-11.99	120	114	1.05	234
Theme Prominence				
Level 1	64	18	3.56	82
Level 2	516	132	3.91	648
Level 3	116	126	0.92	242
Level 4	28	7	4.00	35
Level 5	18	3	6.00	21
Level 6+	50	6	8.33	56
Total	792	292	2.71	1084

Table G3

Cross Tabulation of Policy and Character Negative Themes

	Policy	Character	Policy:Character	Total
Region				
Northeast	19	21	0.90	40
Midwest	71	155	0.46	226
South	232	310	0.75	542
West	137	138	0.99	275
Incumbent				
Yes	34	122	0.28	156
No	425	502	0.85	927
Party				
Democrat	228	356	0.64	584
Republican	226	260	0.87	486
Green	5	8	0.63	13
Gender				
Female	65	135	0.48	200
Male	394	489	0.81	883
Male/Female Dynamic				
Yes	59	56	1.05	115
No	400	568	0.70	968
Successful Candidate				
Yes	72	231	0.31	303
No	387	393	0.98	780

Table G3 (continued).

	Policy	Character	Policy:Character	Total
Density of Negativity				
0-0.99	12	35	0.34	47
1-1.99	53	104	0.51	157
2-2.99	68	94	0.72	162
3-3.99	28	64	0.44	92
4-4.99	5	23	0.22	28
5-5.99	0	0	0.00	0
6-6.99	0	0	0.00	0
7-7.99	50	97	0.52	147
8-8.99	35	32	1.09	68
9-9.99	50	99	0.51	149
10-10.99	0	0	0.00	0
11-11.99	158	76	2.08	234
Theme Prominence				
Level 1	27	55	0.49	82
Level 2	254	394	0.64	648
Level 3	164	77	2.13	241
Level 4	2	33	0.06	35
Level 5	0	21	0.00	21
Level 6+	12	44	0.27	56
Total	459	624	0.74	1083

Note. 1084 total themes were identified, but one theme was not included in this table because it was coded as "Don't Know."

Table G4

Cross Tabulation of Subclassification of Policy Negative Themes

	Past Deeds	Future Deeds	General Goals	Total
Region				
Northeast	13	0	6	19
	(68.4)		(31.6)	
Midwest	49	2	20	71
	(69.0)	(2.8)	(28.2)	
South	148	10	74	232
	(63.8)	(4.3)	(31.9)	
West	38	3	96	137
	(27.7)	(2.2)	(70.1)	
Incumbent				
Yes	13	1	20	34
	(38.2)	(2.9)	(58.8)	
No	235	14	176	425
	(55.3)	(3.3)	(41.4)	
Party				
Democrat	150	11	67	228
	(65.8)	(4.8)	(29.4)	
Republican	94	4	128	226
	(41.6)	(1.8)	(56.6)	
Green	4	0	1	5
	(80.0)		(20.0)	
Gender				
Female	42	2	21	65
	(64.6)	(3.1)	(32.3)	
Male	206	13	175	394
	(52.3)	(3.3)	(44.4)	
Male/Female Dynamic				
Yes	36	1	22	59
	(61.0)	(1.7)	(37.3)	
No	212	14	174	400
	(53.0)	(3.5)	(43.5)	

Table G4 (continued).

	Past Deeds	Future Deeds	General Goals	Total
Successful Candidate				
Yes	35 (48.6)	3 (4.2)	34 (47.2)	72
No	213 (55.0)	12 (3.1)	162 (41.9)	387
Density of Negativity				
0-0.99	5 (41.7)	0	7 (58.3)	12
1-1.99	27 (50.9)	1 (1.9)	25 (47.2)	53
2-2.99	42 (61.8)	4 (5.9)	22 (32.4)	68
3-3.99	17 (60.7)	0	11 (39.3)	28
4-4.99	4 (80.0)	0	1 (20.0)	5
5-5.99	0	0	0	0
6-6.99	0	0	0	0
7-7.99	39 (78.0)	2 (4.0)	9 (18.0)	50
8-8.99	25 (71.4)	4 (11.4)	6 (17.1)	35
9-9.99	41 (82.0)	0	9 (18.0)	50
10-10.99	0	0	0	0
11-11.99	48 (30.4)	4 (2.5)	106 (67.1)	158

Table G4 (continued).

	Past Deeds	Future Deeds	General Goals	Total
Theme Prominence				
Level 1	16 (59.3)	0	11 (40.7)	27
Level 2	165 (65.0)	7 (2.8)	82 (32.3)	254
Level 3	60 (36.6)	8 (4.9)	96 (58.5)	164
Level 4	1 (50.0)	0	1 (50.0)	2
Level 5	0	0	0	0
Level 6+	6 (50.0)	0	6 (50.0)	12
Total	248 (54.0)	15 (3.3)	196 (42.7)	459

Table G5

Cross Tabulation of Subclassification of Character Negative Themes

	Personal Qualities	Leadership Qualities	Ideals	Don't Know	Total
Region					
Northeast	7	6	8	0	21
	(33.3)	(28.6)	(38.1)		
Midwest	10	45	100	0	155
	(6.5)	(29.0)	(64.5)		
South	37	86	183	4	310
	(11.9)	(27.7)	(59.0)	(1.3)	
West	16	33	89	0	138
	(11.6)	(23.9)	(64.5)		
Incumbent					
Yes	13	32	77	0	122
	(10.7)	(26.2)	(63.1)		
No	57	138	303	4	502
	(11.4)	(27.5)	(60.4)	(0.8)	
Party					
Democrat	33	81	239	3	356
	(9.3)	(22.8)	(67.1)	(0.8)	
Republican	36	86	137	1	260
	(13.8)	(33.1)	(52.7)	(0.4)	
Green	1	3	4	0	8
	(12.5)	(37.5)	(50.0)		
Gender					
Female	7	31	95	2	135
	(5.2)	(23.0)	(70.4)	(1.5)	
Male	63	139	285	2	489
	(12.9)	(28.4)	(58.3)	(0.4)	
Male/Female Dynamic					
Yes	11	11	33	1	56
	(19.6)	(19.6)	(58.9)	(1.8)	
No	59	159	347	3	568
	(10.4)	(28.0)	(61.1)	(0.5)	

Table G5 (continued).

	Personal Qualities	Leadership Qualities	Ideals	Don't Know	Total
Successful Candidate					
Yes	16 (6.9)	37 (16.0)	177 (76.6)	1 (0.4)	231
No	54 (13.7)	133 (33.8)	203 (51.7)	3 (0.8)	393
Density of Negativity					
0-0.99	2 (5.7)	12 (34.3)	21 (60.0)	0	35
1-1.99	16 (15.4)	27 (26.0)	59 (56.7)	2 (1.9)	104
2-2.99	18 (19.1)	31 (33.0)	45 (47.9)	0	94
3-3.99	3 (4.7)	9 (14.1)	52 (81.3)	0	64
4-4.99	3 (13.0)	17 (73.9)	3 (13.0)	0	23
5-5.99	0	0	0	0	0
6-6.99	0	0	0	0	0
7-7.99	6 (6.2)	22 (22.7)	68 (70.1)	1 (1.0)	97
8-8.99	2 (6.1)	15 (45.5)	16 (48.5)	0	33
9-9.99	7 (7.1)	18 (18.2)	74 (74.7)	0	99
10-10.99	0	0	0	0	0
11-11.99	13 (17.1)	18 (25.0)	43 (76.0)	1 (1.3)	76

Table G5 (continued).

	Personal Qualities	Leadership Qualities	Ideals	Don't Know	Total
Theme Prominence					
Level 1	7 (12.7)	19 (34.5)	27 (49.1)	2 (3.6)	55
Level 2	48 (12.2)	122 (31.0)	222 (56.3)	2 (0.5)	394
Level 3	7 (9.1)	18 (23.4)	52 (67.5)	0	77
Level 4	3 (9.1)	6 (18.2)	24 (72.7)	0	33
Level 5	3 (14.3)	2 (9.5)	16 (76.2)	0	21
Level 6+	2 (4.5)	3 (6.8)	39 (88.6)	0	44
Total	70 (11.2)	170 (27.2)	380 (60.9)	4 (0.6)	624

Table G6

Cross Tabulation of Negative Theme Types

	Pol. Rec.	Job Exp.	Issue Stand	Crim. Act.	Religion	Personal Life	Other	Total
Region								
Northeast	3	11	19	0	0	3	4	40
	(7.5)	(27.5)	(47.5)			(7.5)	(10.0)	
Midwest	19	44	55	0	0	49	59	226
	(8.4)	(19.5)	(24.3)			(21.7)	(26.1)	
South	99	85	145	0	2	131	81	543
	(18.2)	(15.7)	(26.7)		(0.4)	(24.1)	(14.9)	
West	24	39	119	9	0	69	15	275
	(8.7)	(14.2)	(43.3)	(3.3)		(25.1)	(5.5)	
Incumbent								
Yes	8	34	27	0	0	47	40	156
	(5.1)	(21.8)	(17.3)			(30.1)	(25.6)	
No	137	145	311	9	2	205	119	928
	(14.8)	(15.6)	(33.5)	(1.0)	(0.2)	(22.1)	(12.8)	
Party								
Dem.	100	84	137	9	2	122	131	585
	(17.1)	(14.4)	(23.4)	(1.5)	(0.3)	(20.9)	(22.4)	
Rep.	41	93	197	0	0	127	28	486
	(8.4)	(19.1)	(40.5)			(26.1)	(5.8)	
Green	4	2	4	0	0	3	0	13
	(30.8)	(15.4)	(30.8)			(23.1)		
Gender								
Female	33	30	38	0	2	36	61	200
	(16.5)	(15.0)	(19.0)		(1.0)	(18.0)	(30.5)	
Male	112	149	300	9	0	216	98	884
	(12.7)	(16.9)	(33.9)	(1.0)		(24.4)	(11.1)	
Male/Female Dynamic								
Yes	26	11	36	0	0	22	20	115
	(22.6)	(9.6)	(31.3)			(19.1)	(17.4)	
No	119	168	302	9	2	230	139	969
	(12.3)	(17.3)	(31.2)	(0.9)	(0.2)	(23.7)	(14.3)	

Table G6 (continued).

	Pol. Rec.	Job Exp.	Issue Stand	Crim. Act.	Religion	Personal Life	Other	Total
Successful Candidate								
Yes	24 (7.9)	37 (12.2)	55 (18.2)	9 (3.0)	2 (0.7)	60 (19.8)	116 (38.3)	303
No	121 (15.1)	142 (18.2)	283 (36.2)	0	0	192 (24.6)	43 (5.5)	781
Density of Negativity								
0-0.99	4 (8.5)	15 (31.9)	6 (12.8)	0	0	10 (21.3)	12 (25.5)	47
1-1.99	16 (10.2)	30 (19.1)	49 (31.2)	9 (5.7)	0	43 (27.4)	10 (6.4)	157
2-2.99	27 (16.7)	36 (22.2)	49 (30.2)	0	0	36 (22.2)	14 (8.6)	162
3-3.99	9 (9.8)	9 (9.8)	19 (20.7)	0	0	35 (38.0)	20 (21.7)	92
4-4.99	4 (14.3)	15 (53.6)	2 (7.1)	0	0	7 (25.0)	0	28
5-5.99	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6-6.99	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7-7.99	15 (10.2)	21 (14.3)	40 (27.2)	0	2 (1.4)	34 (23.1)	35 (23.8)	147
8-8.99	10 (14.7)	14 (20.6)	27 (39.7)	0	0	16 (23.5)	1 (1.5)	68
9-9.99	12 (8.1)	18 (12.1)	35 (23.5)	0	0	28 (18.8)	56 (37.6)	149
10-10.99	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11-11.99	48 (20.5)	21 (9.0)	111 (47.4)	0	0	43 (18.4)	11 (4.7)	234

Table G6 (continued).

	Pol. Rec.	Job Exp.	Issue Stand	Crim. Act.	Religion	Personal Life	Other	Total
Theme Prominence								
Level 1	9 (11.0)	20 (24.4)	25 (30.5)	0	0	25 (30.5)	3 (3.7)	82
Level 2	102 (15.7)	128 (19.8)	161 (24.8)	2 (0.3)	2 (0.3)	159 (24.5)	94 (14.5)	648
Level 3	30 (12.4)	18 (7.4)	143 (59.1)	7 (2.9)	0	38 (15.7)	6 (2.5)	242
Level 4	0	7 (20.0)	2 (5.7)	0	0	15 (42.9)	11 (31.4)	35
Level 5	0	2 (9.5)	0	0	0	5 (23.8)	14 (66.7)	21
Level 6+	4 (7.1)	4 (7.1)	7 (12.5)	0	0	10 (17.9)	31 (55.4)	56
Total	145 (13.4)	179 (16.5)	338 (31.2)	9 (0.8)	2 (0.2)	252 (23.2)	159 (14.7)	1084

Table G7

Summary of Linear Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Success of Candidates

Variable	B	SE B	β
Density of Negativity	.024	.004	.193*
Theme Prominence	-.142	.012	-.346*
Oppositional vs Comparative	.013	.030	.013
Policy vs Character	.126	.078	.139

Note. Directionality of variables is as follows: High success is indicated by a low number; a high density of negativity is indicated by a high number; a highly prominent theme is indicated by a low number.
*$p < .05$

Table G8

Negativity Profiles for Variables

	Overall Percentage	Oppositional vs. Comparative	Policy vs. Character	Policy Subdivision	Character Subdivision	Negative Theme Type
Region						
NE	3.7%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
MW	20.8%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	Other
South	50.1%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
West	25.4%	Comp	Char	GG	ID	IS
Incumbent						
Yes	14.3%	Opp	Char	GG	ID	PL
No	85.6%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
Party						
Dem.	54.0%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
Rep.	44.8%	Opp	Char	GG	ID	IS
Green	1.2%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	PR/IS
Gender						
Female	18.5%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	Other
Male	81.5%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
M/F Dynamic						
Yes	10.6%	Opp	Policy	PD	ID	IS
No	89.4%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
Successful Candidate						
Yes	28.0%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	Other
No	72.0%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS

Table G8 (continued).

	Overall Percentage	Oppositional vs. Comparative	Policy vs. Character	Policy Subdivision	Character Subdivision	Negative Theme Type
Density of Negativity						
0-0.99	4.3%	Opp	Char	GG	ID	JE
1-1.99	14.5%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
2-2.99	14.9%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
3-3.99	8.5%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	PL
4-4.99	2.6%	Opp	Char	PD	LQ	JE
5-5.99	0.0%					
6-6.99	0.0%					
7-7.99	13.6%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
8-8.99	6.3%	Opp	Policy	PD	ID	IS
9-9.99	13.7%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	Other
10-10.99	0.0%					
11-11.99	21.6%	Opp	Policy	GG	ID	IS
Theme Prominence						
Level 1	7.6%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS/PL
Level 2	59.8%	Opp	Char	PD	ID	IS
Level 3	22.3%	Comp	Policy	GG	ID	IS
Level 4	3.2%	Opp	Char	PD/GG	ID	PL
Level 5	1.9%	Opp	Char	-----	ID	Other
Level 6+	5.2%	Opp	Char	PD/GG	ID	Other

Note. Opp = Oppositional; Comp = Comparative; Char = Character; PD = Past Deeds; GG = General Goals; ID = Ideals; LQ = Leadership Qualities; IS = Issue Stands; PL = Personal Life; PR = Political Record; JE = Job Experience.

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